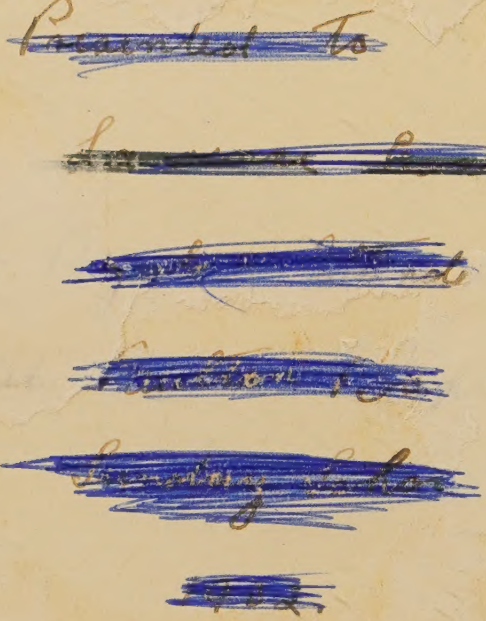
The Rival Captains

Richard Bird.



THE RIVAL CAPTAINS

SCHOOL STORIES

By RICHARD BIRD

THE RIVAL CAPTAINS
THE RIPSWAYD RING
THE SPORTING HOUSE
THE DEPUTY CAPTAIN
QUEER DOINGS AT ALDBOROUGH

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

"'YOU'LL FIGHT, OF COURSE?' SAID COLQUHOUN."
[*See page* 55.

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A PUBLIC SCHOOL STORY

BY

RICHARD BIRD

ILLUSTRATED IN COLOUR BY C. E. BROCK

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THE RIVAL CAPTAINS

CHAPTER I

"HAM, please!"

"Tongue, please!"

"Ham *and* tongue, please!"

"Greedy beast! Don't give him both, Mary! Give him dry bread!"

"Beast yourself! Ham *and* tongue, please, Mary!"

"Keep him waiting till the end! That's mine, isn't it, Jessie? Bags I!"

"It's *tongue*, you fool: you said ham!"

CRASH!

A moment of silence, during which the entire audience paused to realise the catastrophe. Then cheers and drumming on the table with knives and spoons announced the total ruin of at least one plate.

Mrs. Salkeld, commonly called "The Mut," the capable matron of Mr. Chatham's house, left the tea-urns and approached the scene of the catastrophe.

"How did it happen, Mary?" she asked.

"Young Master Pettigrew," said Mary. "He held the tablecloth out level, so I thought it was part of the table. When I put the plate down on it, he let go—his hands were underneath."

"Well, Pettigrew?" demanded Mrs. Salkeld, as Mary began to gather up the *débris* of the plate.

"I was thinking," observed Pettigrew, the brightest brain of all the Lower Study. Bright, that is to say, in schemes of rascality, though not at Latin prose. "My hands got under the cloth, somehow—I suppose——"

"Report yourself to Mr. Baxendale after tea," said the judge, cutting short the plea, "and see what he thinks of it. And no meat for you to-night!"

The last punishment did not seem likely materially to affect Pettigrew's temper or girth. He explained in a loud and offensive whisper to his allies, Blythe, Duckworth, and Sands, that he did not care, because—

(1) Both tongue and ham had been bought cheap, having been kept too long.

(2) He had had two Regular Gorges before leaving home that day.

(3) He had tons of grub in his tuck-box.

"Liar!" said Sands, with genial simplicity. He was a creature whose conversation was conducted

chiefly in monosyllables. "Here, you chaps! Sub up."

With kindly communism Sands, Blythe, and Duckworth divided their portions and gave a third each to their comrade. This he received literally with both hands and appreciative thanks. Despite his recent assertions and the regular gorges, great and rapid progress was made.

It was the first night of the Christmas term. Cricket and the summer were, in the words of the deathless lyric, "things of the past, old dear": the early days of September were bright and promising. Dry, quiet weather, with a nip of slight frost in the early mornings, the stimulating promise of roughnesses to combat and enjoy, the expectation of footer once more—these delights were upon the world in general and Dipcote in particular. It was now half-past five. Nearly all of Mr. Chatham's house were safely folded. All must be in by nine o'clock on the opening day. Appetites were keen and—among the old hands, at any rate—spirits high. The recollection of home comforts, now that the actual leaving had been got over, were being compensated for by the meeting of kindred souls and the exchange of reminiscences. Company gives courage—actual, as well as the "gallery courage" one assumes because it is expected. Even the new boys, under the influence of tea and gossip, were feeling a little less inclined to go out into

the garden and eat worms because nobody loved them.

"Who's school captain this year?" asked Blythe presently. "Anybody heard yet?"

"Ass! who could it be but Scott?"

"Well, there's Colquhoun and Watt, out of our shop, both in the running. And Braithwaite of the School House. Any of them might get the job."

"Scott's above them all in school—second in last term's order, too."

"No colours," grunted Sands. "Bars him. Utterly."

"You mump-head," said Blythe, digging him in the ribs; "he got his cricket colours after all. No footer colours, of course, but——"

"And Watt and Colquhoun both have their footer colours, though they're below him in school. So's Braithwaite," added Duckworth.

"Take it from me," said Pettigrew, with decision, "that Scott will be captain. The Old Man's a whale for work. You can bet your boots and shoes and pyjamas that he'll spot Scott.—Hi! that's a pome!"

"What's a pome?"

"Spot—Scott. What—what?"

"What—rot!" said another voice that they did not recognise. It came from a junior who had hitherto been sitting silent on Pettigrew's right. The unconscious poet turned and looked him up

and down as if he had been a new specimen of the Dipcote *fauna*. So, indeed, he was.

"Hello!" said Pettigrew. "You a new kid?"

The new kid gravely finished some bread-and-butter, exasperated the questioner by a further pause while he drank some tea, and then said "Yes."

"What's your name?"

Another pause, and another drink. ("A bally sponge!" said Duckworth audibly.) Then, "My name's Goss."

"Then what," said Pettigrew with restrained ire, "do you mean by calling my poem rot?"

"I didn't," said Goss calmly.

"You did. I said 'Spot—Scott; what—what!' And you said 'What—rot!' If that isn't good enough——"

"I didn't call your poem rot."

"Gosh!" said Pettigrew, wide-eyed and appealing to heaven. "Here we get a new kid laughing at my literary work, and then calling me a liar! Things——"

"I didn't," persisted Goss. "I said 'What rot!' because you said Scott would be the new captain. He won't."

"What do you know about it?" queried Blythe.

"Well, he's my cousin," said the new boy, helping himself to jam.

"And why won't he be captain?" asked Pettigrew, curiosity conquering anger.

"'Cos he's left. In a hurry."

"Sacked?"

"*No!*" snapped Goss, with a flush. "Had a job offered him to go tea-planting just two days ago. Too good a job to refuse. So he chucked the idea of coming back and is going to sail in a fortnight."

"Ah, well! he was a bit of a stinker," said Duckworth gracefully. "Daresay his cousin will carry on the good old tradition. That makes the captaincy more open."

At that moment a senior boy came in to tea. He caught the words as he was passing, and stopped with a smile that was genuine, if patronising.

"Captaincy of Dipcote 13th fifteen?" he asked cheerily. "One of you specking?"

"Oh, no, Watt!" answered Pettigrew. "Haven't you heard?"

"What? I've only just arrived."

"Scott's left. And the new captain isn't fixed yet. We were wondering——"

He paused. Watt, realising the situation, laughed and interposed.

"—if the Old Man would remember you?"

"I'd be more satisfied if he'd forget me," replied Pettigrew, conscious of the honour of joking with a member of the Sixth.

Watt laughed, passed on, and sat down to tea.

"Decent chap, Watt," observed Pettigrew in an

artless undertone. "*O-ooh!* What's that for?" He bent down and began rubbing his shin.

"Keep you from getting swelled head," said Blythe, sitting opposite. "Hate seeing a pal of mine get above himself 'cos he's spoken to by the footer captain."

"Wait till afterwards!" said the sufferer darkly, conscious that the charge was just. He looked round to find a victim on whom to vent his wrath. His eye fell on Goss, palpably smiling. "Hi, you!" he said; "what the dickens are you laughing at?"

"Nothing much," said Goss amiably, and Pettigrew noticed that, though of quiet aspect, his body and muscles were big. He gloomed at the thought. Times were bad: the country was going to the dogs: new kids were not as respectful as in his young days. Now, they had to be reduced by strategy. It was high time Goss was taken down a peg, but Pettigrew's active brain for the moment could think of nothing.

Tea closed without further incident, and the house dispersed to unpack and gossip. Watt and a few cronies lingered, discussing the summer holidays and cricket averages. Finally, they too went about their respective businesses. The football captain, after arranging his togs in his dormitory, repaired to the First Study, that he was to share during the coming year with Colquhoun. He found it empty, and busied himself pleasantly for twenty minutes

in changing his books from his old study and putting them in order on the new shelves. Presently Colquhoun, a big, solid-looking fellow, with kindly eyes, entered and sat down on the window-seat. He looked grave, even a little uncomfortable. Watt had his back to him at first and noticed nothing unusual. There was a short silence, and then it was broken by Colquhoun.

"I say," he began, and stopped.

Watt turned. "Yes?" he observed.

"I've just been seeing Chatham," said Colquhoun. "He's given me some news—some unexpected news——"

"Been left a fortune, or going to be sacked?" asked Watt cheerfully.

"Neither. He's just told me that Scott has left and I'm to be school captain this year."

"Oh!" said Watt, rather blankly. This was a surprise indeed. He had expected Scott to be made captain; but when he had heard of Scott's leaving he had been optimistic over his own chances. This was not unnatural, for he was above Colquhoun in the school order, and was certain to be elected captain of Dipcote football as soon as the games committee met, for he was the senior colour left. Also, he had his cricket colours. Colquhoun had his football colours and was a sound, if rather slow, centre three-quarter. Besides—he thought silently for a moment, and then gave a short attempt at a laugh.

"Congrats," he said perfunctorily. "I hope you'll have a good year. But won't it be a bit queer you being school captain and me house captain? I mean, my being under you in school, and you under me in the house? It's a technical point, of course, but——"

Colquhoun looked gloomy.

"Chatham says I'm to be house captain too," he said awkwardly. "He's just been explaining——

Watt's eyes flashed angrily.

"But Chat told me at the end of last term that he was going to make me skipper the house."

"I know," agreed Colquhoun. "Chat's just been explaining. He thought Scott was coming back and would be the school captain. Scott's leaving has upset it all. Chat's awfully sorry about it, but he thinks it wouldn't be the best arrangement to have two captains in one house. The Old Man has chosen me (goodness knows why) to skipper the school, and Chat says I must take on the house job as well. I'm—I'm awfully sorry, too, old hoss—it's beastly rough on you. But the thing's none of my seeking. We've just got to make the best of it."

He paused, hoping that Watt would do the decent thing. He wanted him to say, "Well, it can't be helped, and I'll back you up all I know"—the decent thing—the obvious sporting thing for a Dipcotian to do. But he was disappointed.

Watt gave a short, uncomfortable laugh and said, "Well, if the Old Man and Chatham have fixed it up, there's no more to be said. But I must say I think it's pretty stiff to promise a fellow a thing and then change your mind. And I think he might have told me instead of sending a message. A bit casual, anyhow."

"He wants to see you now," said Colquhoun eagerly, trying to soften the blow. "Chat didn't ask me to tell you. I only thought I'd sort of break the ice a bit before you went in."

"Good of you," returned Watt, with a slight sneer. "Well, I suppose I'd better go and be filled up with polite regrets. Where is Chat? In his study?"

"Yes," said Colquhoun. "I'm—I'm awfully sorry, old chap—it's not my fault, you know. I couldn't help it."

"Oh, what's the odds?" said Watt jauntily. "After all, a captaincy more or less doesn't matter. But I rather bar a man making a promise and then breaking it as soon as it suits his convenience. Well, I'd better trot and get the pathetic scene over as soon as possible."

He swung out of the study, leaving Colquhoun chilled. He had guessed that Watt would be disappointed—who would not, after having been promised a captaincy?—but he had not thought he would take it like this. He felt a little resent-

ful—not unjustly; for a man should pride himself on a grown-up attitude towards the blows of fate. Had *he* been in Watt's place, he told himself, he would not have taken it in that way. Sick? Yes, of course he would have been sick, but he would have faced his sickness and put his shoulder to the wheel. If not for the School and House, at least he would have put a cheery face on things for the sake of his own self-respect. The world should have thought that he could take a knock without a wince. As he changed into ordinary garb again he hoped, with a sense of foreboding, that Watt was not going to make an ass of himself.

CHAPTER II

"To frowst or not to frowst, that is the question," declaimed Beaton, *solus*, to the unresponsive ether. He was a member of the Sixth and a house monitor of Chatham's, and he was reclining on a window-seat in his study, gazing at the ceiling. It was a Saturday afternoon and the time was 2.20. A school match—a non-official game against a scratch fifteen got together by an old boy to give the team practice before sterner contests began—was due in ten minutes; and the house was empty. Those who were not representing Dipcote were across on the ground, comparing notes and prophecies; or else, like Dagon, they were hunting, pursuing, or on various errands, legitimate or otherwise. Beaton —to his shame be it spoken—was not a member of the fifteen. He appeared for the second Dipcote team, because a man of his size was worth his place, slack and half-trained though he was. He knew that his duty was to turn out and cheer the Dipcote side. The duty was not in itself unattractive—he liked to play (half-trained) or watch others play. But to lie in a warm study with a detective story, to nibble nougat, "to sleep, perchance to dream"—

these inglorious relaxations appealed no less. At present he was debating the claims of honour and pleasure: "To frowst or not to frowst," he murmured again; "that is the question—and a most annoying question too. Why shouldn't I please myself and stay here? The claims of honour—prestige—public spirit and all that—help! What a thing it is to have a conscience! Well—it's the first game of the year, and I suppose I ought to turn out—— Again, help!"

With a groan of genuine disgust Beaton sat up, stretched himself, and yawned. He put on an overcoat and strolled through the deserted house. "Oh, to be a Lotus-eater!" he mourned, as he approached the door. Suddenly a light shone in his eye. "What a lark it would be to catch some other—I beg my pardon—granted—granted—some beastly shirker who wants to frowst and shirk the game! Let's try the changing-room!"

The search was rewarded. A small boy was drying his hands on a towel in obvious confusion.

"Hello!" said Beaton. "Why aren't you out watching the game?"

"I'm just going, please," said the small boy.

"And having a nice, cooling wash before you go. Good—I love a cleanly creature. Hello!" He paused a moment. Then dropping the critical Sixth-form tone of aloof superiority, he asked, "Is anything up, kid?"

"No, thanks!" replied the fag nervously. "Oh, no!"

"Sure?"

"Quite sure. I—I'm just going to the game. Please may I go?"

"Trot on," said Beaton; and then, "Oh! by the way! After the game's over you might go down to the tuck-shop and bring me in four muffins and four girdle-cakes. Here's the dibs."

"Where is the tuck-shop, please?" asked the small boy, whose name was Caterham.

"Anybody will tell you. Young Goss is fagging for me this week. If you see him on the ground tell him I said he was to go with you. You know Goss?"

"Yes," said Caterham, and vanished speedily.

Beaton followed, wondering why the kid had been blubbing. His eyes had betrayed him. Still, kids do blub sometimes in private, for any amount of reasons. Beaton did not worry unduly over Caterham. He registered a kindly vow to keep an eye on the fag for the next week or so, if he could possibly remember it. Then he dismissed the incident from his mind and sought the playground.

The match was ten minutes old by the time he arrived. Beaton added himself to the crowd lining the ropes and inquired if there had been any scoring yet. No: both lines were still intact. The day was fine and cold, but there had been heavy

rain the previous night: the "going" was very soft, for there had been neither wind nor sun to dry the field. "Mudlarking!" thought Beaton disgustedly: "a day for a forwards' ploughing-match, poor beasts—and few chances for the backs!" Even as he thought this, Merrifield, the stand-off half, received the ball and slung it out to Baker (of the School House), the brilliant centre. The pass was knocked on, and the scrum formed down. The next moment a figure disengaged from the rear of the third rank and broke away with the ball at his toes. A roar from the crowd showed their appreciation as the figure dribbled fast and true a couple of yards from the touch line, running straight and hard. "Who's that?" asked Beaton curiously, and a voice answered, "Clark. A new man —in your house, I fancy." And so it was. Beaton recognised him the next moment as he came towards them and remembered what Colquhoun had told him. This Clark hailed from New Zealand, where his home had been till recently, and where he had been at school. Business had brought his people to England, and though he was turned seventeen, the Old Man, considering the special circumstances, had allowed him to enter Dipcote. Whatever else he might be, there was no doubt about his dribbling powers: they were as neat and true as could be wished. And when, a few minutes later, he took part in a passing run, it was evident that he had a safe

pair of hands and a good eye. Clearly, New Zealand knew as much about Rugby football as the best of Dipcote. And that is known to be praise indeed.

It proved to be a mud-larking exhibition, at least for the first half. A few attempts at heeling were made on both sides, but almost invariably the efforts broke down. The ball was very greasy, and presently a light rain added to the players' difficulties. Dipcote were playing up the slight rise, and against a wind that rose after a quarter of an hour's play. Watt therefore ordered his men to "keep it tight," disregarding a plaintive murmur from Baker that "the line was being starved." Watt was justified by events, for when half-time came there had been no scoring and the wind still held.

The second half of the game showed small improvement from the spectacular point of view, but about a quarter of an hour before the end there was a change. Watt, the footer captain and brilliant wing three-quarter, ordered the trial of new tactics. "We'll have a go at letting it out a bit," he said to Gaskell, the scrum half. "Let's see what the backs can do."

"Let it out, School!" commanded Gaskell, and the heaving scrum obeyed. Somebody hooked cleanly; the ball came straight down the middle. Gaskell whipped it across to Merrifield, who was already on the run. He feinted, swerved, and passed to Colquhoun. Collie ran strongly, though none

too speedily; and just as he was on the point of being hauled down, gave a good pass to Baker. The latter transferred to his wing, Odgers, who mulled it badly. The work had to be done all over again.

"Let it *out*, Dipcote!" said Gaskell, and once more the heeling was good. This time Gaskell cut through himself and passed to Watt. The flying wing gained twenty yards before parting, and then he passed clean over his centre to Baker—a trick he had found useful on more than one occasion. Baker ran strongly and jinked his man. Remained only the back to bar a Dipcote win. But the back was a sound tackler: he got Baker clean and hard. The centre fell awkwardly and twisted his ankle. When he tried to rise he found himself unable. He could not even limp to any purpose.

"Better go off," said Watt, when the damage was evident. "No good crocking yourself any more. We must take a man out of the scrum." His eyes wandered over the eight shovers discontentedly. All were good in the pack, but as potential three-quarters the outlook was discouraging. Suddenly he thought of the new man's dribbling and passes. Clark had said, too, that he had been used to playing a wing-forward game. Obviously he was the man to try in an emergency. "Clark!" he commanded. "You'd better see what you can do as a centre.—All right, sir! We're ready now."

The game was resumed. Dipcote was a man

short in the pack, but pride made the remaining seven shove like eight. The scratch battled manfully, conscious of their numerical advantage, but their forwards were less trained and less together than the School. Despite the lost man (and the subtraction of a brilliant hooker and dribbler is an enormous handicap) the heeling was as clean as ever. Gaskell's heart leapt with joy as he received the ball time after time and slung it out. But it was all to no purpose: Dipcote seemed unable to get through the opposing line and score. The scratch tackling was very keen and nothing was given away. In his new place Clark "was seen to undoubted advantage," as the papers say. His collaring on two occasions broke up attacks; his touch-finding was not half bad, and his manner of taking passes exceedingly good. Every one knew already that he was fast and a good dribbler: few had suspected his possibilities as a three-quarter.

"Hullo, Beaton!" said the voice of Mr. Baxendale, junior housemaster of Chatham's, ex-International, and a good sort. He had been walking up and down in deep anxiety lest the result should be only a pointless draw. "A close game, isn't it?"

"I'm rather preoccupied with the English climate, sir," answered Beaton, with exaggerated woe. "But in the intervals between the ague-fits, I find the rough-and-tumble quite interesting."

Mr. Baxendale (or "Bax") gave an irritated

laugh. He liked Beaton, but would have liked him better if he had shown more energy and less sloth. "You slack old *poseur!*" he grumbled. "You ought to be in the rough-and-tumble yourself, if only—— Hal-lo! What's this?"

"This" was a final effort by the Dipcote side. They had worked down to the scratch twenty-five by surpassing efforts. Again the scrum formed down: again the ball came out. Gaskell passed out to Watt on the touch line. He ran a few yards. Then, having no room to get round, he passed to Colquhoun. The latter transferred to Clark, on whom all eyes were fastened. There was almost a groan as the Dipcote gallery saw how well he was marked. Both scratch centres were converging on him—were almost upon him now! The full back covered the gap. The Dipcote right wing was not up. Jinking was impossible: all avenues were closed: the last chance was lost. Without flurry Clark realised the situation, steadied himself, and dropped for goal. As usually happens, the players themselves halted to watch its flight. Another second and—— Hurrah! a Dipcote cheer rent the air! The ball sailed through the posts, and the scratch was beaten! The whistle blew "No Side," and the eager crowd swarmed on to the field, shouting to their heart's content. A bevy of enthusiastic fags (not least of whom was Pettigrew) escorted the hero Clark in triumph from the ground.

Beaton walked back to the house feeling particularly virtuous. He had done the sporting thing, and now felt free to frowst in peace till prep. On the way he caught up Merrifield and offered congratulations.

"Good game," he said. "I love to see you little fellows carrying on the great tradition. The play of one Merrifield impressed me much."

"Ass!" was Merrifield's thanks. "Yes—it was a splendid game. And wasn't old Clark great?"

"The aged man was certainly a surprise packet," admitted Beaton. "By the way, will you come in after prayers to-night and grill with me?"

"Thanks awfully, but sorry I can't. I promised old Clark I'd go to him," said the beaming Merrifield.

"Right ho!" said Beaton philosophically. "Clark, burdened with years, seems to be in the limelight. I must scheme to get a nod from him: I do love to be in the swim. Hi!" He shouted to the passing hero. "Clark! Come and have tea with me when you've changed?"

"Thanks much!" was the reply from the midst of a bunch of fags. "I'll come."

"Good," said Beaton, and walked on towards Chatham's.

CHAPTER III

Arriving in due course at his study, Beaton began preparations for hospitality. With a practised hand he boiled the kettle over a small spirit-lamp, produced sundry articles of diet from a lordly grub-box, and at last sat down to await the arrival of his guests.

Colquhoun was the first to arrive. After inspecting some new photographs that had been amassed during the holidays, he sat down.

"So you're digging with Shawlands this term," he observed. "What sort of a chap is he? I know he's a swot, but nothing else."

"My room-mate, as these observers of school life call it," returned Beaton, "seems to be an exceedingly decent chap. He is black-listed as a swot, I know, but first impressions are wholly in his favour. Don't be alarmed—he's out somewhere this afternoon, so you needn't bring your lexicon. The only other guest is to be Clark: you know what a lion-hunter I am."

"I know you're an old slacker," answered the captain, with a smile; "and I wish you'd buck up

a bit. What's Clark like? I've hardly had a word with him yet."

"We've not had a heart-to-heart talk so far, Collie. He seems fairly presentable—brushes his teeth at judicious intervals—doesn't use hair-oil—always travels with the bottom button of his waistcoat undone. Judging by to-day's play, he seems to know something of footer. All the same, I don't quite cotton to him. Possibly he may improve on acquaintance."

A knock on the door heralded the entrance of the gentleman in question. "Top-hole game, wasn't it?" was his greeting. "Are you stiff at all, Colquhoun?"

"Not yet, but I daresay I shall be to-morrow. But it's given me an appetite for tea. Beaton, old man! You can pour mine out in a bucket, if you like."

"We're waiting for some hot stuff," said Beaton, rising and looking out of the window. "I sent a fag or two to get it, and the swinelings ought to have been here by this time."

"Then if you don't mind," said Clark, getting up, "I'll just dash off and post a letter I'd forgotten. I'll be back in a few minutes. If the hot stuff comes, don't wait for me."

"Rather not," said Beaton cheerfully. "But if you're too long you may find an empty plate when you return."

Clark laughed and disappeared.

Colquhoun and his host chatted idly for ten minutes and then Beaton suddenly said, "Hullo! What on earth's that?"

The exclamation was caused by a resounding and crashing bump against the door, followed by a noise as of breaking crockery. Colquhoun, being nearest the door, opened it to see what was the matter. Three people were visible, Goss, Caterham, and Clark. On the floor of the passage were the ruins of a plate of muffins, and a plate of hot girdle-cakes (funds were flush as yet!); while Goss and Caterham, in a state of confusion, distress, and butter, were picking themselves up. Clark was looking at them with considerable hostility. There was a moment's silence. Then Beaton observed with a pained accent, "Are those our muffins and girdles?"

Caterham seemed too frightened to speak. Goss, though obviously frightened too, stood up sturdily and brushed some of the dust off. Then he tried to rescue some of the food.

"No—don't trouble to wipe them," said Beaton, as the artless Goss produced a handkerchief of uncertain age. "I like them best as they are. Just put the stuff on this plate. Thanks. Now, about this accident."

"The passage was dark," said Goss. "We ran into him"—his eyes indicated Clark—"coming round the corner."

"I'm sorry your tea's suffered," said Clark to the host. "These kids are clumsy. Shall I remove them to my study and teach 'em better manners?"

"No, don't trouble," said Beaton genially. "First week of term—new kids—torn from all the comforts of home—a little strange to our ways and all that. They'll do better presently. You'd better cut off, you careless blighters, before I peel the skin off you by inches." Goss and Caterham vanished thankfully. Then Beaton turned to Clark. "You don't mind dusty muffins, I'm sure?"

"Thanks," said Clark, sitting down. "They'll taste all right, I'm sure. But it would have been better for their morals if I'd lammed them."

Colquhoun interposed quietly. A timely hint to a new-comer might save future trouble.

"Wouldn't have done, Clark. Only monitors have the right of lamming. Didn't you know?"

Clark flushed.

"No. I'm new, you know—just home from New Zealand. That's how. What is the lamming rule at Dipcote, exactly?"

"Captain of games can lam for shirking games. School monitors can lam for any offence. House monitors lam for house offences. That's all."

"Aren't you going to be a house monitor?" asked Beaton, pouring out tea.

Clark flushed again.

"No. Chatham said that in the ordinary course

I should have been one. But he didn't like to appoint a new chum right away."

"You'll be a house monitor by the end of term," said Colquhoun cheerfully. "Don't you worry. You're in the Fifth, aren't you?"

"Yes. . . . I must say I think it's rather rot. . . . And I suppose if a necessary case arose, a little quiet discipline would be winked at?"

"You mean, if you lammed a kid unofficially?" said Colquhoun. "No: that wouldn't do at all—here."

"Oh . . . why?"

"Because . . . oh, well . . . because it would be stamped on," said Colquhoun quietly.

"By the Old Man?" queried Clark.

"By every one in authority, from the junior house monitors upwards," said Colquhoun. He spoke smilingly, but with firmness. He knew the Dipcote tradition and meant to uphold it.

Clark laughed, not very merrily, and changed the subject.

"What about fagging?" he asked.

"Same thing," said Beaton. "Games captain can fag for games (*e. g.* making kids roll the pitch). School monitors fag anywhere. House monitors fag for house duties."

"So I couldn't even make a kid wash up my tea-cups?"

"That's so," said Colquhoun. "It's a nuisance.

But remember that you're new — you haven't worked your way up in Dipcote. *And*—by the end of term you're practically certain to be a house monitor."

"Provided I'm a good boy?"

"That's about the size of it," smiled Colquhoun. "Don't you worry. You do your job and you'll be all right."

"H'm," said Clark. "Is there any more tea on tap?"

He was rapidly assimilating the atmosphere of Dipcote, but whether he appreciated it was another matter. Additional aspects of constitutional practice were vouchsafed him the same evening, as he and Watt spent the last quarter of an hour before prep leaning against the wall outside the house. The footer captain, attracted by Clark's undeniable powers on the playing-field, and feeling anything but sympathetic towards Colquhoun and his set, was not loth to exchange confidences with the new chum. He began with an obvious question: "How does the old shop strike you after New Zealand?"

"Not half bad on the whole," answered Clark. "Of course, there are drawbacks. We used to have a great deal more freedom out there. Here, for instance, one isn't allowed to smoke."

Watt raised his eyebrows.

"Well, hardly! D'you mean to say they let yours where you were before?"

"Not exactly 'let.' Smoking was against the rules—the official rules. But most of the masters treated the bigger chaps like men—turned a blind eye if they saw you having a whiff. Here, I suppose they'd jump on it at once."

"Rather. And so would the monitors."

"A bit like sneaking, isn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know. . . ." Watt hesitated. He knew the Dipcote Code, and at heart admitted its value, but he did not want to appear less of a man of the world than Clark. "You see, the idea is this. . . . Some one has to police the shop, and it's better we should do it than the beaks. The self-government notion, you know. After all, it doesn't seem far-fetched. You know the rules: if you risk getting caught and break them, you do it with your eyes open. If you're caught, why squeal?"

"That sounds something like your pi pal, Colquhoun," said Clark, curling his lip.

Watt flushed.

"Colquhoun's no special pal of mine," he answered. "I don't see why you should think he is."

"Well, you're in the same study, so I naturally thought you must be. Queer thing that—two captains, he of the school, you of the footer, in the same room. By the way, that seems a bit rough on you."

"Why rough?" Watt knew perfectly well what

Clark meant; but he was very sore about his deposition, and was weak enough to accept solace even from one who knew not Dipcote.

"You're above him in school order, and footer captain as well. I should have thought that good enough to bet on myself."

"So should I," began Watt bitterly, and then pulled himself up. "Oh, well!" he went on defiantly; "the thing's done with. If the Old Man picks Colquhoun, he's got a perfect right."

"Of course he has," agreed Clark: "if he chose, he could pick a fag from the Lower Study. But if I were in your shoes, I should be feeling pretty average narked. And what's more—I shouldn't be anxious to hustle round and do Colquhoun's work for him."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh . . . the police work you spoke of just now. I've no fancy for kicks at any time, even if the ha'pence are provided. But when the ha'pence, in the shape of the captaincy, are subtracted—well, blest if I'd do a stroke! If Chatham and Colquhoun want a house in apple-pie order, let 'em have it by all means! But let *them* work for it and earn their salaries!"

Watt was silent. His knowledge of the code told him that Clark was talking treason; but he would not say "Retro, Sathanas!" Instead, he changed the subject by observing, "You seem to

have the makings of a centre three-quarter in you. Have you ever played there before?"

"Once or twice for a rag, or when a man got crocked," said Clark airily. "Wing-forward's my proper place. But I must say I like being among the backs. Since I tasted blood the other day, I shan't feel so happy in the pack."

"This year the whole line's back," said Watt, gazing into the distance. "Myself and Odgers on the wings. Colquhoun and Baker in the centre. Now that Baker's laid off for a bit I daresay you'll get at least another show—perhaps more—as a centre."

"Well, I shan't be sorry. But when Baker's fit to play it will be a case of 'Back to the forwards again'—that is," he was careful to add, "provided I'm still considered good enough."

"Unless somebody else crocks," said Watt slowly; "or unless Colquhoun goes off. He's a fairly sound centre, but he's slow and not a patch on Baker. . . . However, that's looking too far ahead. Let's go in. Lock-up is nearly due."

A fortnight or more of the term had already gone, and it had been a disappointing opening of the school year to more than one. Colquhoun, who was keen on running Dipcote in general and Chatham's in particular as well as it could be run, saw breakers ahead with no uncertain eyes. Ready enough to be friendly with the man whom he had

been forced to supplant, he realised that it takes two to make a friendship as well as a quarrel. The proffered olive-branch had been contemptuously rejected, and since then the rift had grown deeper, the breach wider. Watt had been more deeply disappointed than he would own even to himself. Chatham had promised him the house captaincy, and Chatham had revoked the grant. Those, Watt told himself, were the bare facts, the bare truth; and he refused to admit that circumstances had altered cases. The poison of Clark's words was not slow in acting. He thought over them that night and many nights after, and their effect was not lessened thereby. In the study, the atmosphere which might have been so cordial had been chilly from the first evening. The temperature rapidly sank to zero. He and Colquhoun soon came to work more or less in silence, exchanging but few words and no confidences. Colquhoun tried more than once to dispel the prevailing gloom, hoping that at least a *modus vivendi*, a policy of give and take, might be found. But it is impossible to establish an understanding with a man who answers with a "Yes" or a "No;" whose longest speech is, "It's my prep to-night. Shall you want the Liddell and Scott the first twenty minutes?"—who grunts a perfunctory "Thanks" on occasion in the surliest of tones. The thing cannot be done. Watt was like the dame in *Tam-o'-Shanter*, nursing

his wrath to keep it warm, and he proved a most painstaking and zealous foster-mother of his unlovely child. In such a mood he was not likely to find congenial company with Beaton, the most cheerful slacker alive. The other study men as yet were not in his orbit. So, Achilles-wise, he sulked in his tent and thought of Clark's words. Watt, in short, behaved badly.

CHAPTER IV

The bell sounded for evening preparation, and the Lower Study juniors took their reluctant places with their books before them. A moment later a house monitor lounged in and the whispers ceased. For a quarter of an hour or so a monitor was responsible for order: then Mr. Chatham or his junior housemaster, Baxendale, relieved guard till nine o'clock. Followed twenty minutes for rest and a light supper of milk, bread-and-butter, and biscuits. Next, prayers and bed: lights out at 9.45. "The studies" were privileged to sit up an hour later if they wished, to work. *Nota bene*, to "work."

Prep passed without incident. Mr. Chatham celebrated his fifty-third birthday happily by completing an article demolishing the arguments of a Particle rival. He also justified his existence by discovering Messrs. Blythe and Sands busy with noughts and crosses instead of Vergil. At nine o'clock he gathered up his books and left. A moment later two of the maids (Dipcote slang termed them "jades") brought in trays on which were glasses of milk and a store of bread-and-butter.

A hungry throng clustered round to relieve them of the burden.

"Hi! where are the biscuits?" demanded Pettigrew.

"The matron is sorry, Master Pettigrew," said the superior "jade," "but the grocer forgot them to-day. There's only bread-and-butter to-night."

The two Hebes retired with discreet quickness, leaving a murmurous throng. Biscuits were popular —especially popular now that they were not.

"What rot!" grumbled Sands. "No biscuits! Wonder if Chatham's trying to save a few farthings!"

"Perhaps the Mut felt hungry and ate 'em herself," suggested Duckworth.

"Let's send a deputation to Chatham and demand biscuits!" urged another—Sawers by name.

"Right ho! You go first, Sawers! Tell him we're starving and won't go to bed!"

Sawers modestly faded into the background, but his suggestion bore more fruit than he had expected. Mounting on one of the oaken tables, Blythe addressed the crowd, glass in hand, his mouth by no means free from bread-and-butter.

"Gentleub!" he said. (A voice: "*Speak up!*") "I *ab* speaking ub! Gentleub! We have here a horrible idstance—a horrible example —a biserable tyranny!—*Urpgh!*" The speaker's Adam's apple gave dreadful evidence that the

bread-and-butter had disappeared successfully. "As I was saying, we have a horrible example of Chatham's greed. We pay frightful sums—pounds and pounds—at least, our people do." (A voice: "*Your governor was sold up to pay his bill!*") "Liar!—That is, to resume . . . we pay pounds and pounds and expect to get decent food in return. Instead of that, what happens? We are starved, gentlemen, positively starved, while Chatham rolls and wallows in his fat—bubbles in his own grease! The evidence? Look at my friend, Mr. Duckworth! Look at him, gentlemen! At the beginning of term he was cheerful and stoutish—shining with the grub he'd eaten in the hols. And now, what is he? A skeleton, gentlemen! A perfect skeleton! His clothes hang on him like a——"

At this point there was an interruption. Duckworth, indignant at these personal allusions, launched a piece of bread-and-butter at the speaker. It struck him precisely on the nose. The psychology of crowds is a fascinating study. The Lower Study, which hitherto had been hanging delightedly on the words of Blythe, gave a brutal and unanimous whoop of joy as the buttered missile squandered itself upon their erstwhile leader. As if by magic the air became thick with bread-and-butter, all aimed well and truly at the unhappy Blythe. He cowered: he dodged: he entreated: he stormed. No answer but shouts of joy, and bread-and-butter

. . . still bread-and-butter. From a peaceful haunt of study the place was transformed *instanter* into a bear-garden. In short, it was that heaven-sent thing, a first-class rag.

While the rag was in full swing Watt came down the passage, going towards his study. The door of the Lower Study was shut, but even two inches of timber could not suppress the appalling din. Watt paused and stood for a moment. Instinct said, "Go in and stop it,"—as he had stopped many a row before. Then, suddenly, he remembered the words of Clark, and his heart hardened. He walked on past the door. Just as he had passed it, Colquhoun came round the corner from their joint study. The noise had reached him.

"What on earth's the row?" he asked, catching sight of Watt. "We'll have Chatham in here in a minute."

"Haven't a notion," replied Watt carelessly. "It sounds rather noisy, I must say."

He walked on towards the study, leaving Colquhoun standing in amazement. That a school monitor and footer captain could ignore such a superlative row at that time was . . . extraordinary. . . . What did it mean? Colquhoun guessed the meaning, but said nothing. His lips, however, tightened, and his face grew dark. Without wasting words on Watt the school captain flung open the door.

Pf—l—hpp!

As Colquhoun entered the Lower Study a piece of bread-and-butter caught him fairly on the cheek. It was a crusty piece, knobby, hard, and happened to have been buttered by a more than usually generous hand. Colquhoun stood still, shut the door behind him, methodically wiped his cheek, and waited a moment, observing the scene. It would have delighted the eyes of sensation lovers or patrons of the cinema, being full of incident and action. The air was dusty, but not too dusty to obscure the flying hail of provender. And when one of the happy warriors ran short of ammunition he did not scruple to use his fists. At least five really hearty personal combats were in full swing in various parts of the room—on the tables, about them and around, and even in one case *under*, grovelling ferociously in death-grips on the floor. Nobody noticed Colquhoun's entrance: there was too much noise and shell-fire. The missile that had found Colquhoun's cheek as billet had been flung haphazard. The Dipcote captain waited some ten seconds, taking stock of the situation. Then, in a voice that conquered the uproar, he shouted "STOP THIS ROW!" And behold! the row stopped.

Some thirty odd guilty parties stood in various attitudes of amazement and sheepishness. The floor was littered with fragments of bread, books, papers, and the paraphernalia essential to Lower

Study life. Collars were burst or dirtied : buttons could be gleaned at the rate of three per square yard. There was an impression—a subconscious atmosphere—of getting behind one's neighbour to avoid the eye of the Cloud-Compeller. After five seconds dead silence the captain spoke. He did not waste words.

" All of you line up against that wall—*sharp !* "

Nobody could know his intention, but everybody hastened to obey. Another moment saw a flushed and dishevelled line of ex-combatants ranged duly. Then came an individual command.

" Duckworth, go and get me a cane from my study."

Everybody guessed Colquhoun's intentions now, and there was a slight shuffle indicative of a certain lack of ease. More than one of the assembled throng had felt the weight of the captain's arm ere this. But—was he going to lam the lot ? If so, his arm would tire before reaching the end. . . There were envious glances towards the ultimate victims . . . a slight surge as if anxiety to change places was being manifested.

When Duckworth returned with the cane Colquhoun broke the painful silence. He had a surprise up his sleeve.

" You all deserve a licking," he said, " but I'm not going to waste time on that now." (General relief and sighs of thankfulness.) " Instead, I'm going to

make an example of a few. I don't know whether one is any worse than the rest, so I'm going to take every seventh man."

He began to count for himself, and in a few seconds had selected three nonentities and—Blythe! The last named had the misfortune to be number twenty-eight, and his indignation at this additional stroke of fate almost conquered his apprehensions. Then and there Colquhoun dealt faithfully with the four Awful Examples, giving them eight of the best each before their co-partners. After the execution was over the captain spoke again.

"If another row likes this occurs I shall lam the whole crowd—a real lamming, not a few flicks like this. Now, tidy up the room. I shall look in on the way to prayers, and if I see a single crumb on the floor I'll come round the dormitories with a hair-brush."

He left the room palpitating with mixed emotions. Blythe and the three other victims naturally were in no mood to rejoice with the rest of the study. Commiseration of their lot was not withheld, but personal relief and amusement were far from being concealed. However, Colquhoun's final threat was not to be ignored. Impelled by the fate of the awful examples, all (save the A. E., who sulked in corners) set to work with a will. By the time the bell went for prayers the Lower Study had resumed its normal appearance. Sundry ablutions had made

the ex-gladiators presentable. And if the security of various collars and buttonless garments depended on "a little piece of string—just a simple little string"—Mr. Chatham was not the man to detect it. Baxendale, luckily, was out at a dinner-party that night.

It is to be feared that the devotions of at least four members of Chatham's were perfunctory. After they were over, the house—bar the lordly studies — went upstairs. There were six dormitories. The largest contained twelve beds; the smallest held three. The head of No. 3 dormitory was the genial slacker Beaton; its deputy-head, Pettigrew. The other members were Goss, Blythe, Sands, and Duckworth. Beaton, of course, was downstairs—probably brewing cocoa or grilling sardines, surrounded by open dictionaries and text-books—"to give it an atmosphere," as he was wont to say. The moment the dormitory door was shut, Blythe, who had been effervescing for nearly a quarter of an hour, found relief in unbridled speech. It need not be set down in black-and-white and in detail. The pith of it was that—

(*a*) Blythe could have a much better time by exchanging lots with Mr. Chatham's dog.

(*b*) Civilisation was a failure and justice a mere figment of the poets.

(*c*) Of all 'arch-beasts and complete outsiders

Colquhoun swiped the biscuit with consummate ease.

(*d*) Did any one know the cost and prospects of success if he ran away?

"Don't be an ass, Chutney," was Pettigrew's comment. (Blythe's nickname had arisen from an Anglo-Indian boyhood.) "Colquhoun didn't bar you personally: you only happened to be a seventh man."

"Buck up, old man!" was Sands' contribution—which was unthankfully received.

"I chose the worst cane I could in the time," claimed Duckworth. "One that looked as if it would split any minute. Besides——"

"Split!" commented Blythe scornfully: "Split! It stung like beans—like awful beans! It simply *curled* round me, and *into* me! The thing *bit*—it *bit*, I tell you."

"Didn't you hear what Collie said?" asked Pettigrew, with a ruminating smile. "Only 'a few flicks.' After all, what are a few flicks, old man?"

"If you don't shut up," growled Blythe, "I'll try a few flicks with a hammer, or a stump, or one of my bed-bars on your skull. You wouldn't be so jolly funny if you'd been a seventh man."

"Still, it was a ripping good rag," said the voice of Goss. So far he had remained silent, being a new kid and wisely bearing himself with modesty (on

the whole) before his seniors. He had undressed by this time, and was sitting up, a pyjamaed form, nursing his knees on the bed. "It was a ripping rag. . . . I wonder when we shall have another. To-morrow, do you think?"

"To-morrow!" quavered Blythe. "*To-morrow!* Listen to him! Oh, listen to him, you chaps! . . . Look here, you half-baked lunatic, have you ever been lammed—*lammed*—in your life? Yes? Well, if you're thirsting for a few of Collie's flicks, just you start another rag to-morrow and *see!*"

"Ass!" corroborated Sands, folding his trousers neatly, and placing them on a chair.

"You seem to be a whale for rags," remarked Duckworth.

"Well, one must do something," said Goss, undismayed by the reception of his proposal. "I was only going to suggest that it might be fun to have a sort of club—a Society of Raggers, you know."

"As how?" queried Pettigrew.

"Oh, a kind of brotherhood—a secret society thing. *You* know . . . have meetings and a password, and . . . and all sorts of larks," concluded Goss, with vague magnificence. "A society would be rather good sport."

"Not for Uncle Joseph," snarled Blythe, as he crawled gingerly into bed. "I've had enough larks for a bit."

"It's not a bad notion," said Pettigrew, staring thoughtfully at the ceiling. "Not bad for a new kid, I mean. We might have no end of fun if the thing was properly organised. There would be me, and Duckie, and Sands, and Chut. Oh, yes! of course, you must be a member, old man! I think we might push it through."

"Er—what about me?" murmured Goss gently. The calm annexation of his scheme by Pettigrew almost took his breath away.

"Oh, you . . . yes . . . you . . ." said Pettigrew. "Of course, you're rather a green 'un yet. Shall we let him in, you chaps? What do you think?"

"Don't see why we shouldn't," said Duckworth doubtfully.

"S'pose so," observed Sands.

"'Mph," said Blythe.

"Then you're elected, kid," declared Pettigrew affably. "Close shave, you see, but you're elected. On the usual terms, you chaps, of course?"

The chaps nodded, completely ignorant of his meaning, but determined to give nothing away.

"What do you mean?" asked Goss.

"All new kids who join clubs," returned Pettigrew glibly, "are supposed to fag for their dormitory. That is, if the monitor wants waking early, the new kid does it. If a chap has forgotten to leave his boots downstairs, the new kid takes them.

If a chap wants to borrow a stud, the new kid lends it. If an impot is set for ragging——"

"The new kid does it, I suppose," said Goss. "Thanks; I think I'd rather not join the club."

There was a pained silence. Then—

"But you've been elected," remonstrated Pettigrew. "You know all the secrets of the club—the password—the cipher—the blood-mark——"

"What on earth are you jawing about?" asked Blythe, interested in spite of himself.

"We must have all those," said Pettigrew, thoroughly wrapped up in the new scheme. "Well, Goss knows at least we're going to *have* a club: he mustn't stay outside."

"I shall," said Goss sturdily, "if you expect me to fag for the dorm."

Pettigrew sighed and gave up the contest. "Oh, well!" he said, "I suppose we'll have to let you in. But what Dipcote is coming to, hanged if I know! Are you a bally Socialist or what?"

"I'm what," said Goss equably. "I say, do let's stop this rot and get on with the scheme. What about that password? Let's have something really exciting! Why not 'Fifteen Men on the Dead Man's Chest'?"

"Cribbed from *Treasure Island*," objected Duckworth. "Let's have something new. What about 'Ragtime'? Joke, see? We're the Society of Raggers. See? Joke!"

Nobody saw. Nobody laughed. Duckworth subsided. The door opened suddenly.

"Quarter to ten. Lights out," said the voice of Chatham.

Pettigrew got up and turned out the gas.

"I say!" he whispered. "Let's have Chatham's name as a password. No one would think of our choosing that."

"Disguise it a bit," whispered Blythe. "Chatham is . . . let's see . . . Chat-ham. *Chat* is French for cat, isn't it? Good. Ham is the same as bacon—or pig (which he is). Why not 'Pussy-pig'? Eh? That sounds rather a hot password for the club."

The Ayes had it without a division.

Meanwhile there had been drama, if not melodrama, below stairs. After prayers were over Mr. Chatham took Colquhoun to his study to talk over sundry unimportant matters. By the time these were settled it was twenty-five to ten. The school captain walked slowly along the dim-lit passage to his study. Two of the other studies stood dark and empty, their doors open. From beneath the doors of the others chinks of light showed that the occupants had not yet gone up. Colquhoun walked on till he reached his own, heavy with thought. As he had expected, he found Watt inside, sitting with a book open in front of him. The captain shut the door behind him quietly, sat down, and waited a

moment, choosing his words. At last he spoke: "I say, Watt!"

The footer captain looked up with an assumption of carelessness. "Well?" he said.

"I'd like to know," said Colquhoun quietly, "why you didn't stop that row in the Lower Study to-night?"

"Perhaps I didn't think it a big enough row to interfere with," returned Watt sarcastically. "Perhaps I'm not the sort of chap to be always shoving my nose in unnecessarily."

"It was a big enough row," said Colquhoun, frowning, "and you know it. In another minute we'd have had Chatham out, and a nice lot of peace-keepers we should have looked."

"Oh, I don't know," answered Watt airily. "I don't know. Daresay you mean well and all that. But there's always a danger of a new captain over-doing things; he's fresh to the job—keen to show he's got a grip of the situation—a bit apt to feel too big for his boots. See what I mean?"

Colquhoun flushed at the insult, but kept his temper down. "Yes, I see," he returned. "I see all that, and more. I can see that you're not keen on doing your bit—not keen on backing me up, or running the house——"

"My dear man, why should I be?" interrupted Watt. "If that's all you can see, I don't think much of your eyesight. So far as all that rot is

concerned, you may go to Jericho—and I hope you'll like it."

"Look here!" said Colquhoun earnestly. "You know you're talking piffle. Why not drop it and help me to run the show as it should be run? I know you're sick at . . . at this captaincy arrangement; but it can't be helped now: I——"

"Be hanged to the captaincy!" cried Watt, giving rein to his gathering anger. "D'you think I'm still grizzling over *that?* I wouldn't have the job as a gift after Chatham breaking his word. If you like to take his leavings you're welcome to them! But I'm not *sick* about it! Sick! Great Scott!"

"Yes, you are," said Colquhoun steadily. "And you know it yourself."

Watt stood up, and the captain followed suit. Both were excited, but Colquhoun had control of himself.

"You'd call me a liar, then?" said Watt.

"Not if I can help it," returned Colquhoun. "But if you stick to it that you're not sick about the skippering—well, I simply don't believe it."

And at that moment Watt let himself go. Anger, disappointment, and the nursing of a sense of injury all drove him on. There were no spectators—no public opinion to make him keep himself in check. His fist shot out and the next moment Colquhoun measured his length on the floor. He scrambled to his feet, burning with rage, while Watt stood glaring,

already sorry that he had been such a fool. Few words were wasted.

"You'll fight, of course?" said Colquhoun.

Watt hesitated. "In here? There's not much room."

"Enough for me," said Colquhoun, setting his teeth. "Get your coat off—and *quick!*"

CHAPTER V

Colquhoun tore off his coat, ablaze with anger, careless of everything but the need for vengeance. He pulled a couple of chairs out of the way and squared up, waiting for his adversary. But Watt did not follow his example. Instead, he stood, staring stupidly, resentfully, at the fellow who had been judged a better man than himself for skippering the school. Now that the blow had been given, steam allowed to escape by an illegal valve, his quick passion had evaporated: only remained an envious, slow-burning anger, that calculated position and consequences. He hated Colquhoun as much as ever, but now he was by far the cooler of the two and could foresee unpleasant sequels. If they fought, black eyes and other visible, condemning signs would give the show away. The least they could expect would be embarrassing questions—very probably a formal interview with the Old Man himself. Watt had no mind for that, and he cudgelled his brain swiftly to find a means of stopping the combat without losing dignity. His luck was better than his deserts. Even as he opened his mouth to frame some halting, temporising excuse,

there was a knock on the door. In a flash Colquhoun was recalled to a sense of things as they ought to be. With a muttered "*Presently!*" he slipped on his coat and said, "Come in!"

Mr. Baxendale entered with a cheerful smile. "Hallo, cap'ns both!" he said. "I've just come across those Norwegian photographs I told you of last week. Couldn't remember where I'd put them, but they turned up in a forgotten drawer. Like to have a look at them now, or were you thinking of going up?"

"Thanks very much," said Watt quickly—a little too quickly and eagerly to be perfectly natural. "We weren't going up just yet. You took them yourself, sir, didn't you? This last holiday?"

"Yes," returned Bax, pulling up a chair to the table, and sitting down. "I had three weeks' glorious salmon-fishing and hope to go back again next year. The best holiday I ever had. And most of these snapshots turned out quite decently. Here's the boat we crossed over in—landed at Aalesund, and then train to——"

He talked on busily, quietly, cheerfully, exhibiting his snapshots and sketching some of the quainter incidents and characters which had come his way during the glorious three weeks. His hearers for the most part listened in silence, now and then throwing in a word or two for the sake of appearances and to keep the ball rolling, both thankful (though

for different reasons) for the timely interruption. It is probable that Bax knew by instinct there was electricity in the air. He had an unsuspected and wide-ranging knowledge of Dipcote politics, acquired by years of sympathetic study, living with, working with, and playing with every variety of boy. He had only a pass degree, but he was an International footballer, and—he did not tell tales. Fellows who got into scrapes or who wanted "tips" (*e. g.* monitors and the like who were doubtful of the best way of dealing with some particular situation), knew that if they consulted Bax they would get a square deal. He would listen peacefully, ask no unnecessary questions, press for no details that were not volunteered, and in a few pithy sentences say what he thought was the right thing to do. It had taken time to establish this position—time and patience and hard donkey-work—but the position had been won, and both he and Dipcote were the gainers. In a word, Bax was "a good sort."

He stayed nearly half-an-hour in the study, reminiscing, apparently unconscious that there were any strained feelings. But if he guessed at an imminent disturbance, he never showed it by word or hint. When he rose at last with a capacious yawn the situation was undoubtedly easier; the crisis had been passed, even if there were still breakers ahead. "Good-night, you chaps!" he said pleasantly, his hand on the door-knob. "I'm

off to bed. I should think you're about ready for it, too."

"We shan't be long now," Colquhoun assured him, smiling. Bax nodded and disappeared. The school captain shut the door after him, turned, and faced his erstwhile foe. There was a short silence. Watt was in doubt what to do or say. He let Colquhoun begin. The school captain's wrath was now under complete control. He was still angry, justly angry, that Watt had made such an ass of himself; but the half-hour's respite had given him time to collect his thoughts and know how to deal with the situation. Bax's photographs, from the artistic point of view, had been almost completely wasted on him, but they had served purposes other than artistic.

"Look here!" he said slowly and quietly, thrusting his hands deep in his pockets: "about that projected scrap of ours a little bit ago. . . . I'm not going to fight you, after all."

Watt was intensely relieved—not that he was afraid of Colquhoun: he only feared being compromised. But in spite of his relief he could not resist a sneer.

"Please yourself," he answered. "If you don't mean to fight, why, there's an end of it. If you choose to funk it——"

Colquhoun flushed, and took half-a-step forward. But he had himself well in hand.

"I don't funk it, and you know that as well as I do," he said. "But we aren't a couple of fags who can scrap to their hearts' content whenever they choose. We're both in the Sixth: you're footer captain and I'm school captain. We *can't* fight—'tisn't Dipcote form—bad for the kids—bad for the house—bad for the school. I don't want to make a speech about it, but you know all that, whatever you choose to say. If you don't mean to admit it, well——" he shrugged his shoulders—"that's your look-out. But you can bet your boots there'll be no fight to-night or later."

Watt sat down and played with a pencil.

"What are we going to do about it, then?" he asked casually. "It's no good keeping up the pretence of being pally after this. But we're at the beginning of the school year, and it's rather a chilly prospect—you and me being in the same study and not on speaking terms."

"I don't know," said Colquhoun gloomily. "I should have thought that, even if you won't pull together as I'd like——"

"Oh, cut all that!" said Watt impatiently

Colquhoun went on unmoved.

"I should have thought we could have agreed to differ in a decent way. We're not obliged to pretend we're pals, but for the sake of the house we needn't advertise the fact."

"Why shouldn't we change studies?" suggested

Watt quickly. "Personally, I'm more than fed-up with you, and I don't suppose you love me exactly. As for advertising, you know jolly well that the house will get on to it pretty quickly anyhow."

"I daresay it could be done," said the school captain, frowning, "though I'd much rather stay as we are—even on the present footing. But if you mean to go on like this, it doesn't look very hopeful."

"It doesn't," agreed Watt vindictively; "and I'd much sooner change studies as soon as possible. The thing could be easily worked."

"I might ask Beaton to come in with me," said Colquhoun meditatively. "He has the next right to this shop. You could go in with Shawlands. That would make the least change. Would you mind that?"

"Anything to get out of here," growled Watt. "Shawlands is a swot, but at least he'll probably keep his mouth shut most of the time—he won't go in for sermons and the Good Boy touch. Yes: I should think that would be the best arrangement. Shall you ask Chatham about it, or go and suck up to Bax?"

"I shan't do any sucking-up," said Colquhoun quietly. "That's not my line. I'll see Bax about it to-morrow."

"The sooner the better," returned Watt, rising. "I'm tired of this."

He went out without even a perfunctory good-

night, leaving Colquhoun to muse on the prospects of a turbulent year. But, being a practical youth, the school captain wasted little time on unprofitable musing. When finally he turned in, it was to the soundest of sleeps. There was no sense in worrying until he had to.

The next day he saw Bax about the studies. "Watt and I don't exactly hit it off," he said frankly; "and both of us would like to change if it can be worked. Could Beaton and Watt swop?"

Baxendale looked keenly across his room. His secret fears of trouble were being verified. "Is there no chance of your hitting it off better presently?" he asked. "Isn't it rather early days as yet?"

Colquhoun shook his head. "I'm afraid not. Both of us think it best."

Bax knew his man and his worth, and nodded his head. "All right," he answered. "I'll see Mr. Chatham about it. Of course, I'm sorry; and if . . . if you can oil the wheels at some future date, I should, if I were you."

"I will if I can," returned the captain. He could not say more without giving the show away, and he had no fancy for that.

Bax did not pursue the subject, but in due course interviewed Mr. Chatham. Here, as he had anticipated, no objections were raised. So long as he was left in peace behind the baize door that

separated the house from his private abode, he let Bax and his monitors pretty well do as they liked. Provided, that is, that there was no noise. To Mr. Chatham Noise was the infallible sign that poisonous leaven was at work. If there was No Noise, he could brood over his Greek particle eggs and hatch them with an easy conscience.

So the change came about easily, but, of course, there was comment. To do Watt justice, he spread no misleading rumours. Inquiries were answered by a mere "Colquhoun and I weren't particularly thick, so we arranged a swop," and Colquhoun said much the same—even to Beaton, the genial slacker and new partner of his study. He was a man who could keep his mouth shut, and he saw no use in spreading the tale of the fight that had so nearly come off. In the Lower Study the wildest reports were current. It was said that there had been a fight—Watt had beaten Colquhoun into a pulp, and *vice versa*—they had been caught in the throes by Chatham, whose glasses had been broken while intervening—they had been beaten apart by Bax with a club—the Mut had remembered dog-lore and thrown pepper over their noses—these, and a score of other and equally popular fictions (mostly emanating from the inventive Blythe), had a considerable circulation for a week or so. But they were not circulated outside Chatham's. In due course it filtered out that the studies had been

changed, but Dipcote at large was only allowed to guess—it got no information, not even conjectures, from the loyal Chathamites. It is a good rule not to wash your dirty linen in public.

At first the new arrangement seemed to work not badly. Colquhoun and Beaton were congenial souls, save that the captain could not approve of Beaton's apathetic attitude towards footer and training. But it was impossible to be really angry with such a decent slacker for long. Watt and Shawlands were in no sense chums—the differences between them were too great. But they had nothing to quarrel about, and led politely separate lives without friction. Besides, Watt soon came to spend a good deal of his free time in the study shared by Clark and a nonentity (who was in the Fifth and a house monitor) called Wharton. Judging by the sounds of merriment that were frequently heard, the football captain and his new friends found a good deal in common. It was evident that Watt was not crying over any milk that had been spilt. For the present he gave no sign of overt rebellion. To those who had discerning eyes he was slack—he didn't trouble himself much about his monitorial duties—he was apt to turn a blind eye to ordinary peccadilloes. But even those symptoms were not sufficiently patent as yet to warrant the Lower Study in taking liberties. And the captaincy of the Fifteen kept him pretty busy and

interested. Whatever else he was slack in, Watt was keen enough on the Dipcote team doing well. He turned out faithfully to training, and he saw that others as well turned out. At present there were no very vital problems presenting themselves. Baker's twisted ankle had proved rather more serious than at first had appeared. Condemned to inaction, he was told that there must be no more footer for him till further notice, and the doctor would not commit himself to a definite date. So Clark was kept in the three-quarter line, where he played with considerable success. A loss to the forwards, he was undoubtedly a gain to the backs. As good centres were not plentiful that year, and as there were several capable forwards oscillating uneasily between the first and second fifteen, it was obviously the better course to use Clark as a centre—at least, for the time being. What would happen when Baker resumed his place, no one—not even Watt himself—knew. There were sundry guesses, but any ass can guess.

CHAPTER VI

It happened one day that the man from New Zealand found himself alone in the Fifth Form room, considerably against his will and inclinations. His Latin Prose had not met with the approval of Mr. Cotherstone, who had told Clark that the handwriting would disgrace a member of the Third, and that he must stay behind after school and re-write it. Clark had no option but to obey, and no opportunity for grumbling, since Mr. Cotherstone, though a decent sort, stood no nonsense. At 12.20, therefore, Clark, with an ill grace, put the finishing touches to the fair copy, blotted it, and walked up to leave it on the master's desk for future approval. He laid the sheet on the desk, put a book on top to prevent it blowing away, and then his eye caught a gleam of burnished steel. It came from a bunch of keys hanging from the desk-lock: Cotherstone had evidently forgotten to put them in his pocket on leaving the room. Clark paused for a moment to think. His first notion was that of a hooligan junior—to get some of his own back by disarranging the desk's contents; his next, to take

the keys and throw them away. Both ideas he dismissed, thinking that Cotherstone might remember he had left them and also that Clark had been alone in the room. "Oh, well!" he muttered: "I might as well have a squint inside, anyway." After a hasty visit to the door to make sure nobody was about, and after listening for a few seconds, he raised the desk lid and looked inside. At the first glance there was little to satisfy his mischievous curiosity: a dozen or more books—dictionaries, text-books, and registers—pens and pencils—a few confiscated knives and the like—promised small scope for his activities. Idly he picked up one or two books, hoping to discover some private records or papers that might "give the man away," never for an instant troubled by the thought that he was doing a dirty trick. Presently, as he glanced at a book's title, his eyes gleamed. True, there was nothing in this particular volume to discredit Mr. Cotherstone, but the man from New Zealand evidently found it of interest. He noticed that the book was very dusty, as if it had not been used for a long time, and further investigation showed that only a few of the leaves had been cut. "He *can't* spot me!" reflected Clark. "Even if he remembers I was in here, he could prove nothing." With a swift resolution he put the book in his pocket, closed the desk, leaving the keys in the lock, and left the room unobserved.

When it suited his purpose Clark could keep his mouth shut, and he said nothing to anybody of his thievish action. Apparently Mr. Cotherstone never noticed anything unusual, for nothing was said for a week or more. Then came some developments. The fourth study of Chatham's was inhabited by Merrifield, Lutworth, Cole and Price—all being members of the Fifth. Price was a quiet, solid sort of youth. Cole and Lutworth merit no detailed description, for they were exceedingly ordinary members of Dipcote. Merrifield, besides being a good stand-off half, was a cheerful, happy-go-lucky creature with too much money to spend and too little respect for rules. After breakfast one morning they repaired to their study for a joint effort over some neglected Plautus. It ought to have been prepared the night before, but they had trusted to luck and "after breakfast." The consequence was that after ten minutes' fierce wrestling with the author, they were (to use Merrifield's phrase), "in the cart."

"We'll never get it done before school," he said desperately: "it's even stiffer than usual. Let's get Shawlands to give us a con. He knows pretty well every bally book by heart."

"He's up with Bax, talking shop," said Cole. "I saw them go upstairs just after brekker. Shawlands is no good."

"What about Clark, then?" suggested Merri-

field. "He usually seems to get through. I might trot along and——"

At that moment Clark came into the room to borrow some blotting-paper. He was greeted with cries of joy.

"The very man! Come and con this over to us! We can't make out a line, and there's only a quarter of an hour——"

"Sorry," said Clark; "but I'm just finishing off my verses."

"Rot! You must give us a lift——"

"Imposs," declared Clark. "I was turned last week for verses. But I'll lend you a leaf from a crib if you like."

"Good egg," said Price appreciatively. "We didn't know you had one."

Clark smiled.

"No sense in advertising it. If one of you chaps will come along I'll give it you."

Lutworth offered himself as messenger, and in a few moments the four idlers were busy with their texts and a couple of loose leaves, evidently torn from a Bohn. With this friendly aid they made good progress, and by the time the bell rang they were more at ease over their prospects. Merrifield, with his usual carelessness and audacity, resolved to go one better than his fellows.

"I'm going to make sure of a good thing," he announced, gathering his books together. "I'm

going to slip these handy little pages into my Plautus. No detention for me to-day or henceforth. Loud cheers."

The others laughed and went across to school, by no means apprehensive. In due course Big School prayers ended and the classes went to their respective rooms. Mr. Cotherstone entered the Fifth Form, sat down, opened his Plautus, and began the lesson. It progressed on the usual lines for a space, and then Merrifield was put on. He stood up easily, read the Latin with the usual amount of false quantities and accompanying groans from the master, and then began to translate. Having the page of the crib opposite he had small difficulty in giving satisfaction, but he was careful not to go too fast or too fluently, lest he should arouse suspicion. Now and then he even inserted an intentional mistake, losing a place or two in consequence, giving, in fact, quite an artistic performance. Presently, however, he was pulled up.

"One moment, please!" said Mr. Cotherstone. "Just construe those two lines again."

Merrifield obeyed, giving the crib version word for word. Cotherstone looked puzzled: he was a first-rate classic and knew Plautus (among many other things) from A to Z. If his memory had not played him false, Merrifield had translated an obsolete and discredited reading. To make sure, he dived into his desk for another text-book that he

knew he had. He verified his memory, Merrifield suspecting nothing, for, of course, he had no idea where Clark's crib had come from. "No," said Cotherstone, triumphantly emerging, "I thought I was right. That translation is due to a misunderstood gloss. It ought to be . . ." and he expounded the correct version. "Yes, sir," said Merrifield cheerfully and went on. Then, suddenly, Cotherstone remembered that the form was using the same text as himself. Suspicion was inevitable. The boy had either been given a false con by an ignorant friend, or else he had been using a crib — an old crib. Without saying anything, he stood up and walked across, determined to make sure first that Merrifield's book was the same as his own. The translator had his wits about him, however; in no case must Cotherstone observe the leaf, whatever his motive might be for a sudden walk. Swiftly and noiselessly he slipped the loose leaf under the next page. He was not spotted. Cotherstone took the book out of his hands naturally enough, with a "Let me see your book a moment. You may have the old reading." He studied it, muttering, "No . . . no . . . you've got the correct version." Idly he fluttered a few leaves to look at the title-page, and then the loose leaf slipped out. Cotherstone, still unsuspecting, stooped to pick it up, and at once the whole plot was laid bare—rather, a part was laid bare. "Hallo!" he said slowly;

"have you been reading this off as you went along?"

Merrifield was no liar, whatever his other faults might be. "Yes, sir," he said simply and waited for sentence.

Mr. Cotherstone walked back to his desk, sat down, and thought a minute. Then he spoke.

"This isn't playing the game, you know. If you were a smaller boy, I should probably give you some lines—perhaps even a licking. But you're big enough to be reasoned with—I rather think even a small boy is big enough to be reasoned with. Cribs aren't allowed, you know. There are two reasons why you mayn't use them: first, the moral one, that it's dishonest to pretend to know a thing and gain marks in this way. I needn't enlarge on that. Second, using a crib weakens your mental muscles. You know that if you don't take exercise, your bodily muscles get flabby. Similarly, if you don't force your mind to work, your mental muscles get flabby. That's why cribs are barred. See?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. I needn't say any more. You will bring me the crib from which this leaf was taken after school, and don't be so silly *or* so dishonest again."

"Very well, sir," said Merrifield, thankful that no questions had been asked as to the ownership of the book in question. He could easily afford to buy Clark another, and he knew that he had been let

down lightly—that Cotherstone had been extraordinarily reasonable.

"Don't think," said the master earnestly, "that I condemn all cribs at all times. Sometimes they're useful, if properly used. I mean, for instance, if a fellow does his level best and hardest to work out the con first and finds himself stumped after a real effort, why, then he may use a crib to advantage. But most fellows don't do that—the temptation to save themselves trouble is too strong." He smiled gently. "I've used many a crib in my time. Occasionally I use them still. I have one or two in my desk at this very moment—one of the actual book we're using." He dived into his desk, still smiling, and began to search. . . . The search was not short. When he emerged again, there was no smile: he began to understand.

"I *had* a crib in my desk," he said; "but it is not there now. Somebody must have taken it out."

There was a dead silence. Fellows began to glance at their neighbours, Clark apparently as interested and wondering as the rest. The scene was developing.

"Merrifield," said Mr. Cotherstone quietly, "did you take that Bohn from my desk?"

"No, sir," said Merrifield stoutly, feeling extremely uncomfortable. The master looked at the treacherous leaf again.

"It's from a Bohn," he said gravely. "I don't want to accuse you unjustly, but I must ask you again: are you *sure* you did not take it?"

"No, sir, I didn't," declared Merrifield, hoping that all future questions might be able to be answered as truthfully.

"I've never found you untrustworthy," said Cotherstone, looking keenly at him. "If you didn't take the book (and I tell you quite frankly that I accept your word), will you please tell me where you got this leaf?"

Merrifield was silent.

Cotherstone repeated his question. "Will you tell me where you got this leaf? Did you buy a crib for yourself?"

"No, sir."

"Did you borrow one?"

Dead silence.

"Merrifield, did you borrow a Plautus crib from any one?"

Still no answer.

"Merrifield," said Cotherstone gravely, "you needn't be afraid that I shall ask you for anybody's name. I don't believe in getting information in that way. But for the sake of yourself I must press for this—did you borrow a crib?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Merrifield. "I borrowed a leaf, that is, but I'm not going to sneak."

"Quite right," agreed Cotherstone quietly; "you

may sit down. Now, if the fellow who took this book (supposing he *did* take it) will own up at once, I will treat it as a joke—a joke in bad taste, but thoughtless and without any intention of stealing—and say no more. Very likely it was done for a 'lark.' If any boy took it, will he please stand up, and *own* up?"

There was no response.

Cotherstone waited a couple of minutes, then—

"Well, it is possible I may have made a mistake and lost my own book. This page may come from another. I will put a more unavoidable question. Will the boy who has this crib stand up?"

And again there was no response. Mr. Cotherstone's jaw set in firmer lines. He asked no more questions. He only said, "Some fellow apparently does not know the meaning of honour, and is a coward. I shall take no further steps to find out: I will merely leave him with the knowledge that he is a disgrace to the form and the school. Merrifield, you will bring me that book, as I said; but I shall not question you at all. Now, Trowers, will you please go on with the construing?"

The lesson ended without further incident, and after morning school Merrifield sought Clark, uncomfortable, and with a bad taste in his mouth. He had no objection to larks and broken rules, but this was different.

"I say," he began awkwardly, as he faced Clark

in his study; "why didn't you get up and tell Cotherstone?"

"Why should I?" asked Clark, cool and unembarrassed.

"Because . . . oh, well . . . because it was the sporting thing to do," returned Merrifield, with a clouded face. "I don't mind using a crib, but this sort of thing is . . . isn't playing the game."

"Why not?" said Clark, smiling.

"Well . . . it's much the same as telling a lie," said Merrifield, writhing under the necessity of appearing a "preacher." "And . . . and it's hardly the thing to bag books."

"I didn't bag it," asserted Clark, still smiling.

"What!"

"I didn't bag it," he repeated. "This crib is my own—I bought it years ago. Cotherstone must have lost his own crib, and calmly jumped to the conclusion that some one had stolen it. You seem as quick to suspect a chap as he was."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Merrifield, ashamed of his ready suspicion. He had a generous spirit, and never dreamed a man could be so ready with a lie. "I'm most awfully sorry. I never thought——"

"Don't worry," said Clark forgivingly. "I daresay I'd have thought the same myself. Only in future you might give a fellow the benefit of the doubt until you're sure."

"I will," asserted the repentant Merrifield.

"But, I say! What am I to tell Cotherstone? He told me to bring him the book."

"Well, you've no right to take mine," said Clark pleasantly. "Cotherstone evidently won't force you to give me away. Just tell him the facts—that the book belongs to another chap and he has made a mistake."

There being no other course, Merrifield followed Clark's advice. Mr. Cotherstone heard the explanation, accepted the "facts" without comment, and sighed in private. The yarn might be true, of course: he had no means of proving the contrary. But he kept an extra sharp eye on the Fifth Form, and no more loose leaves were introduced into school. Clark cheerfully went on using the crib, and so did Merrifield, Cole, and Lutworth. They considered that they had given no promise; they were ready to pay the penalty if caught; and they did not worry over their minds getting flabby. Also, they accepted Clark's tale about the crib being his own. Price said nothing but "H'm," when he heard the explanation. He was not a garrulous youth. But from the day that Cotherstone gave the Fifth the reasons for not using cribs, Price dropped Bohns and kindred aids. He made no talk about it, but "sweated out" his Plautus by himself. His friends laughed at him a little, but they knew Price was a good sort; and in course of time things adjusted themselves, as things generally do.

CHAPTER VII

"COME out for a training run," suggested Colquhoun to Beaton. It was a half holiday and there had been heavy intermittent rain for three days. The playing fields were so thoroughly soaked that footer was "off" for the time being, the authorities not being anxious to cut up the turf in its present hopeless condition.

Beaton looked dismally out of the study window. It was pouring hard, and he shuddered.

"Not for me, thanks," he answered. "I hate getting my fur wet. In the second place, I'm not in training. In the third place, I have no wish to be. In the fourth place——"

"In the fourth place," interrupted Colquhoun, "you're an old slacker. Well, if you won't come for a run, will you get your mac and come for a walk? Don't be such a fug-rat! Think of the horrible example to the Lower Study!"

"Think of the comforts I should have to leave!" retorted Beaton, yawning. "Well, to oblige a friend, and in the interests of the public weal, I'm not so dead set against a walk, but a run is completely off the map. Bring in the sedan-chair or a stretcher,

and I'll trip it on the light fantastic for a little space."

Greatly cheered by this concession, Colquhoun hauled Beaton by main force from his cosy window-seat, thrust him into a macintosh, and haled him forth for a dose of fresh air and confidences. They strode along briskly for an hour through the dripping countryside, doing their four miles in sixty minutes despite the frequent protests of Beaton. As they neared home again Colquhoun suggested a short cut.

"We'll go across the field and in by the back way," he said. "That will save at least five minutes and ought to appeal to your lazy heart."

"The grass will be beastly wet," grumbled the other.

"I'm soaking already," said Colquhoun equably. "We shall have to change in any case. Don't talk bosh."

Protesting to the last, Beaton followed his leader over a five-barred gate. They crossed a couple of fields and at last found themselves in the paddock adjoining Chatham's. Sturdily they splashed along until they were close to the house. Suddenly a scream rent the air—the scream as of some one in pain.

"What's that?" said Beaton, stopping short. "Somebody was yelling somewhere."

"Dunno," said Colquhoun, puzzled. "There's

nobody in sight. It wasn't a horse's neigh, either. Wait a sec."

They stood still, listening. For a moment there was silence: then again came the scream, or rather yelp. This time there could be no mistake. It was the yelp of a human being, and sounded much like the noise made by a junior member of Dipcote suffering correction for his sins.

"It sounded as if it came from one of the dormitories," said Colquhoun, frowning. They were close to the house wall now, and began to walk slowly on. "Can any of the kids be ragging upstairs?"

"It sounded to me," said Beaton slowly, gazing round, "as if it came from the carpenter's shop."

Colquhoun's eyes followed his. From one side of Chatham's projected a small wooden annexe or shed. It was two stories high: the lower part was used as a general store for ladders, buckets, and the usual *impedimenta* a house collects in the course of years. The upper storey was fitted up as a carpenter's shop, where boys might amuse themselves on wet days or in their spare time, constructing corner-cupboards, book-shelves, canvas canoes, and similar necessaries of life. The school, of course, had its own big carpenter's shop, where an experienced man gave practical instruction in the use of tools, but in addition each of the houses had a smaller shop for the convenience of their own members.

As Beaton and Colquhoun looked questioningly towards the upper storey, they observed a peculiar incident. One of the windows was open a few inches at the top. An arm was seen to push this up until the window closed—only an arm—nothing more. A moment later there was a third yelp, but the sound was considerably muffled; indeed, it barely reached the straining ears of the listeners.

Beaton nodded sagely.

"That's it. Some blighters are playing the fool in there—probably the fags have invented a new Indian torture and are trying it on the nearest victim."

"It didn't look like a fag's arm from the size of it," said Colquhoun, frowning. "Hallo! there's that sound again. We'd better look into this. Shall I chuck a stone up at the window or shout?"

"Neither. They've shut the window to drown the sound, and you can bet they won't show themselves. If we chuck a stone they'll slide off into the house, and where are we then? In the dark, old man—the blank and obscure *tenebrae*. Think again."

"Then we'll go round into the house, steal down the stairs, and enter by the door. We ought to get them red-handed, and then——"

"*Then*," said Beaton impressively, "we will smite them hip and thigh with saws, mallets, chisels,

adzes (what *is* an adze, by the way?), and any other lethal weapons that may be lying about. "Up, Guards, and at 'em!' without delay."

The plan of campaign seemed sound. Swiftly Colquhoun and his friend entered the house and went upstairs. They turned down a corridor that led towards the annexe, descended a few steps to a lower level, and found—a shut door.

"Precautions!" whispered Beaton. "They don't want Bax or Chatham to hear a sound. A plot, Sherlock! A darksome plot."

They opened the door noiselessly and paused. In the distance there was a dull, reiterated sound. It reminded one faintly of carpet-beating. Only, carpet-beating is not usually accompanied by gulping noises. These last were faint, but distinct, and their suspicions deepened. Closing the door behind them, they advanced. A corner had to be turned before their goal could be reached. The carpet-beating became louder as they stole along. They quickened their steps. The corner was turned swiftly, and then—CRASH! Beaton's foot overturned a couple of empty cans that had been placed in the dark passage. There were two steps to be negotiated, leading to the shop. The cans rolled noisily down, clanging tinnily as they sped.

Beaton rubbed his shin disconsolately. "My usual luck!" he murmured: "what an ass I am to thrust myself forward!"

"Come on!" said Colquhoun, pushing past. He flung open the door of the carpenter's shop, expecting to find a bunch of youngsters ragging some new kid. Instead, he found nothing. The shop was empty.

"That's queer," he said, standing in the doorway and gazing round. "I'll swear there was some one in here a moment ago." He advanced, followed by Beaton, who limped a trifle.

"Look under the benches," suggested the latter. "They must be somewhere. Or behind the door."

Colquhoun obeyed, but nothing and nobody were discovered. Searching possible hiding-places was not a long job: the shop was small, and the furniture inconsiderable.

"Aha!" said Beaton, walking on. "Here we have it!" He pointed to a window that was open. "They've got away through here."

The two detectives leaned out and gazed. Below them and around was the paddock in which, a few minutes past, they had been standing. But it was on the opposite side of the shop, and here the ground rose sharply. Nothing but grass was to be seen.

"D'you mean they've dropped out and cut round by the back?" queried Colquhoun. "It's fifteen feet or more—they'd be afraid of breaking their legs."

"Oh, I don't know," demurred Beaton, measuring with his eye. "The ground's as soft as putty: hanging by the arms would take off six feet for a big chap——"

"A *big* chap, yes! But we thought these chaps were fags——"

"They may have been fags, but . . . that arm looked more like a big chap's. . . . Just cast your eye down there, m'lad! That's where they dropped: you can see the boot-marks dug into the mud!"

"You're right," said Colquhoun, stretching out to see. "I say! we might get a clue from them!"

Beaton grinned.

"Watson demurs. Watson puts the bridle of common-sense on the zealous Sherlock. You can tell even from here that those marks are pretty well squdged up. Even if they weren't—the boots that made 'em are being worn at this moment. We couldn't get them from the boot-boy till to-morrow, and by then the marks will be washed out. If you think of getting all the spare boots in the house and trying them in turn to see if his second pair fits, I bet you'll look rather an ass before you're through. Fancy the picture of the school skipper, surrounded by forty pairs of boots, sitting on a mud-heap looking for clues! Come off the roof!"

"I expect you're right," said Colquhoun, turning away from the window. "But I wish we'd caught

'em! I wish you hadn't fallen over those cans. Whether it was a big chap bullying a small 'un, or a few kids ragging, I wish we'd nabbed 'em!"

"Wishing's no good," observed Beaton philosophically. "If he's done it once, he'll probably do it again 'somewhere, somehow, sometime.' He'll get lagged in the end. But I tell you what we might do!" he added, as if struck with a sudden idea.

"What?"

"Before the rain washes out those footprints we might take a plaster cast of the clue! Shall I go and scrape plaster off Chatham's drawing-room walls? It's probably the nearest plaster available."

With a swift movement he just avoided Colquhoun's boot.

CHAPTER VIII

One of the rules of the newly-formed Society of Raggers was that no member could be considered properly qualified until he had performed some feat of daring or novelty. Duckworth, Sands, and Goss had each passed the First Degree, but up to the present no opportunity for prowess or originality of idea had presented itself to Pettigrew or Blythe. One day it suddenly occurred to the latter that the summer holiday task—the reading of a certain poem by Byron—offered a hint. The idea was discussed and approved of, and in the fulness of time the five members of the society found themselves at 3.15 in the paddock adjoining Chatham's house. They were in possession of a goodly length of clothes-line, borrowed without permission from a convenient drying-ground, and they were in the highest spirits. As they shut the gate behind them, Duckworth licked his lips.

"Pity there's not a horse handy," he observed. "If only they hadn't sold the gee that pulls the cricket-roller, we'd have had the very thing."

"But that brute was a kicker—a wild beast—

a sort of broncho," demurred Blythe. "They say he killed a man—a cricket pro.—at his last place."

"Don't believe it," said Duckworth. "Anyhow, if he had, what odds? It would have made it more exciting."

"I daresay—for you chaps. But you wouldn't have seen *me* on its back."

"You wouldn't have funked it, surely?"

"Yes, I would," said the truth-teller. "Catch me doing the Mazeppa act on a beast like that. Now, you *can* trust Billiken—Hi! Billy! Billy! Billy!"

Some twenty yards from them grazed a peaceful and aged donkey. It had belonged to Mr. Chatham's sister; and when that lady left Dipcote for a London husband she had persuaded Chatham to give her pet a pensioner's situation. Billiken, as the donkey was called, did no work from year's end to year's end. He grazed perpetually, without seeming to find his lot monotonous. But now events were overtaking him. By a policy of peaceful persuasion the Society of Raggers soon had hold of various parts of his person. Goss stood at his head, restraining and cajoling him. Blythe climbed on his back in a trice, and with the eager help of his fellow-members extended himself upon it.

"There's not too much room," he grumbled, clawing at the mane to make his precarious situation

more secure. "Hurry up with that rope, you chaps, and mind you make it fast!"

Pettigrew produced the clothes-line. Then, with some trouble, they bound Blythe more or less firmly to the (alleged) fiery steed, winding the line round and round the donkey's body. The patient beast stood still the while, chewing grass, and showing not the smallest desire to move. When the job was finished and the knots made fast, Pettigrew took command.

"Stand away from his head, young Goss!" he ordered. "Keep clear of his heels, you chaps! Now, then, Billiken! Gee up! C'lk! C'lk!"

The donkey turned his head and gazed upon the clicker. Not a vestige of intelligence did he exhibit.

"Gee up! C'lk! C'lk!" repeated Pettigrew. "H'd up, you beast!"

But Billiken went on chewing grass.

The impatient president ran to the hedge-side and cut himself a switch. "He ought to move now!" he observed triumphantly. "A few whangs will——"

"Hi!" said Blythe, in alarm, craning his neck up as far as his bonds permitted. "I say, Pet! Don't lay it on too hard—the brute might run away!"

"But isn't that what Mazeppa's gee did?" said Pettigrew, pausing in astonishment. "Aren't you going to do the Mazeppa wheeze? Isn't——'

"Yes . . . so long as you don't go too far," answered Blythe, wriggling with anxiety. "We just want him to gallo—to trot, I mean, round the field a bit. Then you stop him, untie me, and——"

"But I want to see you simply hum round!" declared Duckworth. "A regular blue streak, so to say. And if we could persuade Billy to jump the hedge, it would be simply *rare!*"

"Don't be an ass!" begged Blythe, pallid at the mere thought of such a feat. "Look here! I think you chaps had better untie me! We'll——"

"Gee *up!*" repeated Pettigrew, laying on the switch with vigour. "Don't you funk it, Chut! You're bound to be all right unless he lies down and rolls on you."

"*Lies down and rolls on me!*" quavered the heroic rider. "I say . . . I might be killed! Don't you play the goat! Pet! drop that stick! The brute will let off in half a second. Pet! d'you hear what I say? Drop it!"

"Doesn't seem to have much effect," grumbled the president, staying his hand. "I don't believe Billiken could raise a trot, much less a gallop. "Strikes me he'd need some gunpowder exploding under him to make him start."

"Good old Billy!" said Blythe, with fervour. "Well, if he won't move, there's not much sense in my staying up here—*Owh!!!*"

He emitted a howl of fear as the donkey suddenly

flung up his heels, narrowly shaving Duckworth's head. While the others were talking Goss had approached the rear of the animal, armed with a pin. With this instrument he had spurred Billiken, and the steel bit deep. Whackings (in reason) the donkey did not mind. His hide was tough and his endurance mighty. But in the whole of his career a pin had never come his way: the wound to his pride was as great as to his flesh. In quick succession he lashed out with the apparent vigour of youth. As the heels flashed up and down, and up and down again, Blythe, securely shackled, gave vent to cries of anguish. The four spectators fell back out of the danger zone, encouraging Blythe with well-meant but futile shouts. Suddenly Billiken stopped kicking and broke into a smart trot. Pettigrew and Co. followed, whooping with joy; this was a Mazeppa-ride indeed. Whether the donkey feared a fresh attack with pins, or whether he was intoxicated by his own unsuspected powers, will never be known. Whatever the cause, he changed from a trot to a canter, from a canter to a gallop. In a few moments he was careering round the paddock, hotly pursued by the society. At every pace the unhappy Blythe was bumped and jarred, finding that bone meeting bone, and flesh meeting flesh, was anything but a comfortable experience. He shouted to his friends: he shouted to the donkey. The result was increased speed and additional

discomfort. In mid-career Billiken came to the gate: alas! it had been left open! The donkey appreciated this welcome fact and dashed out on to the road. At once Blythe was made aware of the difference in resilience between turf and good macadam. On and along sped Billiken; on and across towards the school. A knot of fags saw him coming. With shouts and waving arms they tried to arrest his wild career, but only succeeded in deflecting his course. Instead of keeping along the broad highway, Billiken turned up the drive past the Third Form room. On he went, pursued by a gathering crowd. Before him on a sudden he saw a haven of refuge from the hallooing chase. The gate to the School House back premises stood open and in he dashed. James, the butler, was standing in the yard. With great presence of mind he shut the gate—from the outside! James was an elderly man, unused to portents of flying donkeys. And so Billiken found himself at peace and alone within four walls. He stopped, to the intense relief of Mazeppa, and took stock of things. For the moment he was safe.

"Steady, old man!" begged Blythe, in throbbing accents. "Steady, old boy! Whoa! my beauty! Gee up—I mean, whoa! WHOA! you brute!"

Billiken moved forward. There was a fascinating door ahead—the kitchen door, open, from which issued a smell of savoury food. With quiet deter-

mination Billiken stepped into the room. The cook was carrying a pile of plates across the room, her back to the door. "There's all these knives, Johnny," she said, without turning, thinking she heard the knife-and-boot boy come in. Whether Billiken's sense of humour was touched cannot be ascertained. It may have been only the expression of grateful relief that prompted him to observe "Hee-haw" in a harsh *crescendo*. The cook ("I was that took aback!" she said later) turned with a scream that rivalled Billy's music, and the plates fell in a clattering cascade to the flagged floor, where a dozen or more were shattered with a heartening clamour.

"Oh, you brute!" said the cook, regaining her self-possession; and then, as she observed Mazeppa, she sought refuge in a chair. "*Well!*" she observed, holding her heart. "*Well!* Whatever next, I wonder!"

Blythe was wondering, too. "I say!" he urged with fierce intensity. "I wish you'd untie me. I'm about sick of this game. Please—*please* untie me!"

The cook regarded him with a sympathetic malevolence. The broken plates moved her to wrath. The sight of a fellow-creature in such a situation stirred her pity.

"Won't he bite?" she queried distrustfully.

"Not at this end," said Blythe, trying to use his head to indicate the tail.

"THE COOK TURNED WITH A SCREAM."

"But he'll kick!" she objected, rising and approaching a few steps.

"Try the middle," suggested Blythe. "But—oh, please—*please* get me loose as soon as you can! I'm bruised from head to foot!"

"Poor lad!" said the cook, softening. A thought struck her. She ran, or rather waddled, to the scullery and returned with a few carrots. These she offered diffidently to the donkey, who accepted them with eagerness. While he was munching the cook released Mazeppa by the aid of a kitchen knife and much elbow grease.

"*Ooch!*" said Blythe, stretching, when he was free once more. "*Ooch!* but I'm stiff! I say, Mrs. Coulson—thanks most awfully! I thought I was a goner."

"But what about my plates?" asked the cook, eyeing Blythe and the broken fragments alternately.

"Say the donkey escaped (he *did*, you know) and frightened you. Be a decent sort, Mrs. Coulson, and don't give me away."

"I don't know that you deserve it," said the cook, musing.

"I'm most awfully sore!" urged Blythe. "I b'lieve I'm black and blue. It was worse than a lamming by a long chalk!"

"Well, if you'll get the donkey out quietly, I'll see what I can do," said the kindly cook.

With fervent expressions of gratitude Blythe took

Billy by the mane and led him forth. He was received by his friends with profuse expressions of admiration for his horsemanship. "All very well!" grumbled Blythe, as they led the donkey back to durance vile. "But it's the last time I let you chaps tie me up—and you can bet your boots on that!"

"Anyhow," said Pettigrew cheerfully, "you've done your deed of heroism: you're a fully-qualified member of the society. There's only me now who hasn't got a scheme."

"Why not ride the donkey too?" suggested Blythe.

"No good doing the same thing twice," returned Pettigrew hastily. "Something is sure to suggest itself sooner or later. There's the bell for afternoon school. We can talk it over to-night in the cave."

This cave was only a cave by courtesy. In reality it was the stokehole, or furnace-room, where the heating apparatus of Chatham's lay. It was strictly out of bounds, but the Society of Raggers held many of their meetings in it, because it was private, and, after all, a society must meet somewhere. They had taken pains to note the movements of the boot-boy, whose duty it was to look after the furnace and the appurtenances thereof. After much sedulous watching they discovered that 'Enry stoked the furnace at regular intervals—at 7.30 a.m., at 12.15, and again at 7 p.m. Apart from these times, so far as they could discover,

nobody visited the stoke-hole. By exercising caution and silence they had found it feasible to meet there undisturbed. That evening at 6.15, after a hurried tea, the society met and was constituted in the illegal spot. The president, Pettigrew, of course, was in the chair—or what served as a chair, viz. an upturned bucket. The rest sat in various attitudes of indifferent comfort on the hot-water pipes. After an animated discussion on Blythe's exploit had been in progress, Duckworth cut in with: "But the point is, what's Pettigrew going to do? He's the only slacker yet."

"I'm not slack!" protested Pettigrew. "If any of you chaps will suggest anything decent, I'll have a shot at once."

"We ought to be able to think out something between us," said Duckworth hopefully. "For instance, you might . . ."

"Yes?"

"Oh . . . any old thing," concluded Duckworth. "Why not bash Chatham's topper over his head some night when he's not looking?"

"Does Chat ever wear a topper at night?" said Pettigrew sarcastically. "Any other chump got a plan as bright as that?"

"Rock a master's desk till the things inside spill about," suggested Sands.

"Been tried," said Pettigrew. "The desks are all screwed down."

"Why not crawl into Chat's study one night," broke in Goss, "and put chalk in his inkpot? That would be exciting. You could steal in after everybody's asleep. It would follow out Rule 1, and take a bit of doing."

"It would," agreed the president. "Suppose I got caught by Bax on the way downstairs, and me in pyjamas! Five yards from where Bax keeps his canes—a regular stud of them! *What* a goat you are!"

"You find something to object to in every plan," complained Blythe. "It's hardly decent. After all, we've each done our little bit. What's the good of having a president, if he doesn't pres.?"

Pettigrew, feeling his position tottering, became conciliatory. "The moment I can think of something new—some really good scheme—I'll have a shot," he assured them. "I'm not the chap to back out of anything that gives you half a chance—Jove! it's getting late! We'd better adjourn the meeting."

One by one at judicious intervals the members stole up the short flight of stairs. Arrived at the top, the door was opened cautiously and the escaping member listened. If no footsteps were heard a swift exit was made. At the end of five minutes only the president was left. He listened cautiously at the door, heard nothing, and slipped out. As he did so Clark came by wearing rubber-soled gym-shoes.

Pettigrew's heart bumped.

"Hello!" said Clark, stopping. "You gave me a start!"

Pettigrew compassed an ingratiating smile. He might have replied with a *tu quoque*, but thought it better to say, "Did I? I'm sorry."

"But you've no business down there," pursued Clark, staring at him. "Oh, don't worry—I shan't peach. I'm not a monitor." He smiled as if he were really pleased, and Pettigrew thought him a good sort. "I say! Would you like to do me a favour?"

Pettigrew was both flattered and grateful.

"Rather, Clark!"

"Good. I have a letter here"—he held out an envelope—"that's awfully important. I want it delivered down town to-morrow between 12 and 1. *Delivered*, not posted. Will you do it? I can't possibly get down myself—Chatham wants to see me then about a letter from my governor."

"I'll take it like a shot."

"Thanks, awfully. Do you know the Fleshergate?"

"But that's out of bounds!" said Pettigrew, surprised.

"A few yards or so," said Clark carelessly. "I don't suppose a chap like you would funk that, eh? If you're just ordinarily careful, there's no risk at all."

"Er—no . . . but it's . . . it's more than a few yards . . ." stammered Pettigrew.

"Not much," smiled Clark. "Besides, isn't the furnace-room out of bounds? Of course, if you funk it, I can——"

Pettigrew did some rapid thinking. To be candid, he did funk the job, though he was not keen on admitting it. But . . . here was the chance of an exploit that would count as a qualification in the eyes of the Society of Raggers. Again, Clark had been very decent about the stokehole business in promising not to give him away. Yet still he hesitated. He had broken bounds more than once during his Dipcote career, but never had he been so far as the Fleshergate. The "few yards" so carelessly spoken of by Clark would take him six or eight minutes' sharp walking. . . . But, the Society of Raggers . . . Suddenly he decided to risk the adventure.

"Right oh!" he said; "I'll go."

"Good man," returned Clark, slapping him like a comrade on the shoulder. "I knew you had pluck. If you come to my study at 12 o'clock I'll give you the letter. You go to a small newsagent's shop—Whitehead is the name. Ask for Mr. Whitehead himself, hand him the letter, and say it's from me. You mustn't forget, for it's most important."

Pettigrew went to bed that night with con-

siderable qualms. However, he had promised and did not mean to back out. So at noon next day he got a "Leave down Town" slip initialled by Baxendale and Chatham, which gave him the freedom of the city (in bounds) between 12 and 1. He got the fateful letter from Clark, repeated his instructions to make sure there should be no mistake, and then set off on his errand. In due course he crossed one of the bridges that span the Cutha—Dipcote's river—walked down Abbey Street till he reached Quex's book-shop, then on to the Market Place. Callaby's hat-shop marked the boundary of his freedom. Here Pettigrew paused and stood still for a few minutes, gazing anxiously about him to spot chance "beaks" or monitors. None were in sight, and presently, taking his courage in both hands, he walked swiftly on towards the forbidden goal.

Despite Clark's tribute to his pluck, the president of the Society of Raggers felt anything but easy as he walked on. However, he reached the Fleshergate without mishap and speedily found Whitehead's. It did not look much of a shop, but Pettigrew did not wait to moralise on its lack of æsthetic value. Instead, he dived in hurriedly and knocked on the counter. A door opened in the rear and a woman, blowsy and untidy, appeared.

"Well?" she said snappishly. "What is it?"

"Mr. Whitehead in?" asked Pettigrew.

"Joe!" called the woman. "Here's a gentleman for you!" Without further ceremony she disappeared. Joe—presumably her husband—took her place speedily. The chief thing Pettigrew remembers about him is that his nose was very highly coloured. He did not waste words on the president, but merely said, "What is it?"

Pettigrew produced the letter.

"Who from?" asked Joe.

"Clark."

"Oh . . . Mr. Clark . . . That will be all right," said Joe. He turned back to the rear and Pettigrew went towards the exit. When he reached the doorway he stood transfixed. Two yards off, standing by the kerb, mercifully with their backs towards him, were Colquhoun and Mr. Baxendale. "The kick-off is at 2.0," he heard Bax say, and Colquhoun reply, "I think it's 2.15, sir." Pettigrew slunk back into the shadow, determined to wait until his enemies had moved on. The shop was empty, for Joe had vanished. Peering round the door Pettigrew could both see and hear. In dire agony the voice of Bax reached him. "Well, you may be right, but we can soon settle it. I'll get to-day's *Sportsman* and see. Here's a paper shop."

Bax moved towards the emporium of Mr. Whitehead, and Pettigrew's blood congealed.

CHAPTER IX

The president of the Society of Raggers glanced wildly about him with despairing eyes. Mr. Whitehead's shop was a mere box-room, the counter being only some six feet long and the "shop" itself three feet wide. There was no corner in which to hide—no time to climb over the counter and beg Joe or his spouse to conceal him as a personal favour. In a few seconds Bax or Colquhoun, or both, would enter to buy the *Sportsman*. No classic god was at hand to transform the ill-fated Pettigrew into a laurel or any other object likely to frustrate pursuers. Suddenly the hunted youth had an inspiration. At one end of the shop three or four empty sacks lay in a heap on the floor. In a flash—very much quicker than it takes to write—Pettigrew's decision was made. He curled up on the floor, making himself as small as he could, and pulled the sacks over him. The shop was dark, the windows being small and obscured with hanging journals of the *Crimes News* type, or sheets that advocated the claims of racing specialists—kindly men who offered to make your fortune by giving O.K.,

infallible, red-hot-from-the-course information—in a word, touting tipsters. Pettigrew had barely time to drag the sacks over him when Baxendale's foot was heard upon the threshold.

Crouched beneath his unsavoury covering—the sacks abominably recalled decaying vegetables—Pettigrew heard Mrs. Joe enter and Bax ask for a *Sportsman*. Luckily the paper was popular in the Fleshergate, and Mrs. Joe had no difficulty in finding a copy. Hardly daring to breathe, oppressed with a nervous longing to sneeze, Pettigrew heard the rustle of the paper as it changed hands, the dropping of a penny in the till, and the mutual retreat of Bax and Mrs. Joe. The president waited an interminable and odorous minute to make sure. Then, with the utmost caution, he crawled out. Tiptoeing to the door, he watched with enormous zest the backs of the school captain and the master as they walked away. Pettigrew lost no time in leaving, but he followed another route home. When he was once more safely within bounds he heaved a sigh of great relief. "No more of that for me!" thought Pettigrew, assuming the jaunty air of one conscious of right. "It's too beastly dangerous. . . . Phew! . . . I wonder if I've caught anything from those filthy sacks. . . ."

The other members of the society received his tale with a polite interest that rather annoyed him. None of them seemed to do justice to his presence

of mind and powers of resource. They were more interested in the contents of the letter and Clark's possible object in having it delivered. Their guesses at truth, however, failed to explain it satisfactorily, even to themselves. Goss offered the most popular suggestion—that Joe was a German spy in disguise, but beyond the mere suspicion there was nothing to support the conjecture. In the end they abandoned it, with the reservation that the society must keep its eyes skinned and be prepared to save the empire at all costs. The resolution was moved by Duckworth, seconded by Sands, and carried unanimously. The society then went in to dinner, where Pettigrew distinguished himself by cajoling three helpings of pudding from a friendly "jade." As he explained to his friends, after the recent crisis he felt that he really needed it.

The same night a new institution added another stone to the cairn of Dipcote tradition. After prayers were over and the house had retired to bed, Messrs. Merrifield, Price, Lutworth and Cole made ready for light amusement and relaxation. The table was cleared, and from a cupboard that had a padlock Lutworth produced a pack of cards. "Is it to be bridge or whist to-night?" he asked, pulling up a chair.

"Neither," said Merrifield, humming a tune. "'La-la-la-di-da! I didn't want to do it . . . I

didn't want to do it!'—I've got a new game. I'm going to teach you poker."

"Poker? Is it any good?" asked Cole. "Why not stick to something we know?"

"'Cos poker is good fun," said Merrifield, beginning to shuffle the pack. "It's much more exciting. . . . Of course, you have to bet—it's a frightful gambling game—you can lose pounds and pounds——"

"Then I'm not in," said Price. "I don't want to lose pence and pence, let alone pounds."

"That's all right, old thing," returned Merrifield, unruffled. "You need heaps and heaps for this game, but we'll use matches. We'll take a couple of boxes each from the study store and play with those. It's ripping sport."

"Right ho!" said Price. Cards were forbidden at Dipcote, but they were winked at by the monitors. So far there had been no *causes célèbre*, no betting scandals, for Dipcote did not play for money. Even Colquhoun was known to enjoy a rubber of bridge. "Shall we need a couple of boxes each, though?"

"You may need more before you're done," said Merrifield, dealing skilfully. "Now, for us, it's best to fix a limit—an ante of one match, say—limit the rise to not more than ten matches a time—total limit fifty—Oh! jack-pot ante is double."

The others stared at him. "This sounds beastly

complicated," objected Lutworth. "I vote we play bridge."

"It's as easy as lying," said Merrifield amiably. "I only learnt it"—he hesitated a moment—"er—quite recently. Once we've had a few rounds you'll get the hang of it. We'll play trial rounds without having any stakes first. Now, I ask if any of you wants cards."

Merrifield's prediction proved true. The elements of poker are not difficult—a sphinx-like countenance and courage being the chief necessities. And when one is only playing for matches, there is no great call on courage. After a few rounds of instruction Merrifield's pupils began to feel their feet and clamour for the real thing.

The instructor smiled.

"Told you it was a top-hole game," he said cheerfully. "Right ho! It's Cole's deal: ante up, gentlemen!"

The game proceeded without incident, matches changing hands with incredible swiftness. At the end of a quarter of an hour Lutworth was obliged to request an advance. "Both my boxes are done," he announced. I'm going to bag another from the cupboard."

"All right; only mind you keep count," said Merrifield. "We want to find out how we stand at the end." Lutworth got his fresh funds and sat down again. A few minutes later there was a

knock on the door. Magically all cards disappeared and ever-ready Xenophons came out. The door opened and Colquhoun came in. There was a general sigh of relief as the cards were resurrected.

"Jove! You gave us a start, Collie," said Price.

The captain grinned amiably.

"What is it?" he asked. "Bridge?"

"No: poker," said Cole. "It's a new wheeze and jolly good fun. Hence the matches."

"I don't see," said Colquhoun; whereupon the currency system was explained to him. The school captain made no comment, good or bad, and after watching for a time presently withdrew. But somewhat later he sought the counsel of Baxendale. The latter was an unofficial father-confessor, who could be trusted to give advice without making an unfair use of his knowledge. Every one had confidence in Bax. He knew more of the inside of Dipcote than anybody: also—or *because*—he kept his knowledge to himself. Bax was correcting some proses and smoking when Colquhoun entered.

"Bag a chair, cap'n," said Bax, after a glance over his shoulder. "I'll be ready in a minute."

It was nearer ten minutes before Bax heaved a sigh of relief, filled a fresh pipe, and established himself in a big armchair opposite. "Now, then," he said, "get it off your chest."

Colquhoun plunged in at once.

"I found some chaps playing cards to-night,"

he said, "and I don't quite know what line to take. You know that we all play—only now and then, of course—that we wink at it. I was playing whist myself only last night."

"Then why this sudden spasm of conscience?" queried Bax. "Were the malefactors betting?"

"Only with matches. But they were playing poker. I've not played poker myself, but I've heard a bit about it and I watched a game to-night. It seems to me to depend mainly on its betting attractions, and I couldn't help wondering how it might affect us. I may be an ass, but I'd like to know what you think about it."

Baxendale gazed at the fire, puffing his pipe, without speaking for some minutes. Then he said, "I think you were right to wonder. Poker won't do here. Theoretically, of course, all card games are forbidden, and you've no right to wink at any. But in practice there is a difference. Bridge or whist you can play for the game alone, without any stakes at all. Poker you can't. These chaps were playing for matches . . . yes . . . no harm in that, you'll say. . . . Well, it's a pound to a penny they won't stop at matches. Presently they'll start counting matches as being worth fifty a penny or something—something that looks absurd, but can soon mount up. I know poker. Cap'n, this must be stopped."

"Well, I can hardly report them, having played

cards myself," said Colquhoun, poking viciously at the fire.

"No, but you can do this. First of all, you must drop all cards yourself—even bridge. Then you can see these chaps and say, 'Look here! Cards are against the rules, and in the future I mean to drop on any chap playing. No notice taken of past offences; only—you've got warning, now: see?' That's the only honest course. They won't thank you, but it's your job to stand that. What say, cap'n?"

"Thanks," said Colquhoun, his brow clearing. "I'll do it."

"Good man," rejoined Bax, striking a match to relight his pipe. "The thing must be stamped on straight away. I'd tell 'em to-morrow, if I were you. By the way, how are things going in the house?"

"Oh . . . fairly well, I think," answered the captain, but his tone did not sound wholly satisfied. "Nothing to talk about one way or the other."

"How do you and Watt get on, now that distance is lending enchantment to each other's view?"

"So—so . . . Distance doesn't seem to lend much enchantment. As a matter of fact we hardly speak to each other."

"That sounds rather cheerless," was Baxendale's comment. "You're not ass enough to stand on your high horse, I'm sure."

"No, sir. . . ."

"You know you can drop the 'sir' up here. . . . In my den and to those in authority like you—and Watt—I'm the usual 'Bax,' pure and simple. Fire ahead."

"Thanks," said Colquhoun gratefully. "I know that. No: I don't think I've stood on my high horse. I'm ready to be pally if Watt would be. . . . Only, I think he's still a—a bit sore about the captaincy."

"Pity," said Bax thoughtfully. "He's not a bad chap at heart, I believe. . . . He doesn't interfere at all, I suppose?"

"Oh, no. . . . As a matter of fact, I wish he'd take a bit more interest in house affairs. He's getting rather slack."

"Well . . . Let's hope he'll come round presently. . . . I must try to have a yarn with him. And now I'm going to bed. Good night."

"Good night, and thanks awfully," said Colquhoun, rising. "Hope I haven't bothered you."

"Not a bit. Glad to be of use. But remember, poker must be stamped on—and at once."

So far as in him lay Colquhoun tried to follow out Bax's injunctions. He saw Merrifield and Co. next evening and stated his case. He had played cards himself, he said frankly. But he had come to the conclusion that monitors and house monitors had no business to wink at any rule being broken,

however trivial the rule might be. So, in future, if he caught any one playing, there would be trouble. There was no specific mention of poker yet, designedly. His announcement was received without enthusiasm—in dead silence, as a matter of fact. Colquhoun departed with a feeling of distinct chill.

"I must say," broke out Merrifield, as soon as the captain's back was turned, "it's pretty cool to come and talk like that! Here he's been playing all his life, and now he has a sudden attack of virtue!"

"Like his cheek!" corroborated Cole. "Of course, we shan't stop, but we'll have to be jolly careful."

"We'd better get a bolt on the door," was Lutworth's suggestion.

"Not allowed," said Price. "We'd be dropped on at once."

"You're not afraid?" asked Merrifield.

Price shook his head.

"No. But I think there's something in what Collie said. He's not a bad sort."

"He's a beastly prig," said Cole disgustedly. "And a hypocrite too. I'm fed with him."

"Oh . . . I don't know," said Price, musing.

CHAPTER X

Towards the end of November Colquhoun began to feel inclined to pity himself—a weakness from which hitherto he had been free. He had begun the term with high hopes and serene confidence. Made captain of Dipcote contrary to his wildest expectations, he had resolved to pull it off successfully, to make his year of skippering a worthy unit of the honourable Dipcote tradition. For some time past he had been doubtful of his probable success. The school on the whole seemed to be going strong, but his house (where he might fairly have looked for a long suit) gave him grounds for uneasiness. Nothing was patently wrong, he told himself—but, the wheels needed greasing. The atmosphere was oppressive: it was like the promise of thunder. There was a sense of antagonism to the code, a lack of support from those who should have been his ready helpers; and things seemed to be getting worse instead of better. The Lower Study was "all right" on the whole, so far as he knew, but when leaders are divided there is danger of subversion in the lower strata. Of the studies,

he had the friendly good-will of Beaton. But Beaton, in spite of some spasmodic efforts and the fact that one couldn't "rag" him, was known to be a slacker. Shawlands did his job satisfactorily, but he was a swot and not a leader of thought in Chatham's. Merrifield's study had adopted an attitude of aloofness, if not hostility, since the poker episode. Watt was not on speaking terms, even now. Clark . . . well, Clark was suave and pleasant enough, but somehow Colquhoun didn't take to Clark—didn't feel as if he could trust him. Wharton in the ordinary course would not have counted much, but he was in Clark's study, presumably a chum of Clark's, and therefore an addition to the enemy. The sum total, then, of Colquhoun's allies was Beaton and Shawlands —possibly Price, too. It was not an inspiring total.

Apart from his other worries, Colquhoun was not easy in his mind on the poker question. Since his interview with the poker players he had made no fresh discoveries, nor had he done any "nosing." He went on with his usual routine, hoping that his hint would be enough—hoping, but not believing. Merrifield and his friends were not bound by monitorial responsibility, and it would be odd if they accepted the captain's hint at its face value. Again, to what extent poker might be played in other quarters Colquhoun did not know: he could

only guess at its probable developments; and his guesses were far from cheering. His own football, too, was worrying him. He knew that, though he might be a sound centre three-quarter, he was neither brilliant nor fast. Clark was undoubtedly the better man. Baker's ankle had recovered. He had just played a trial match in the ranks of the second fifteen, and had emerged unscathed and triumphant from the ordeal. The match with the Old Dipcotians was due in a few days, and some change would have to be made in the school line. Would Clark go back to the scrum, or . . . ? Baker was certain to come in, for Baker was even better than Clark. Colquhoun drummed on the table with his fingers, knitting his brows. There was certainly thunder in the air.

"And look—see what I got this morning," he said with a wry smile, throwing a letter across to Beaton. "From the inevitable aunt."

"Best wishes for Willie's health, I suppose," suggested Beaton, picking it up. "Has she knitted you a kettle-holder or hot-water-bottle jacket in the school colours, or does she threaten a visit?"

"I shouldn't mind that," said the captain. "Aunt Clara is a jolly good sort. She sent me half-a-quid in that as a sort of make-weight. No: if you read it you'll see she wants me to look

after a kid she knows—the son of a friend of hers."

"Sweet job," commented Beaton, reading. "H'm . . . h'm. . . . 'Would be so grateful if you could keep an eye on Hughie . . . rather a nervous child . . . has no father . . . do what you can for him. . . .' Dear me! dear me! the tragedies of life! Are you going to sit up at night and hold Hughie's hand, in case he's frightened of the great big dark?"

"Don't rag, old man," said Colquhoun gloomily. "I'd like to do what I could for the old lady, but you know that one can't do much in the overseer line for a new kid. On the whole, he's got to fight his own battles."

"Who is the tearer of heart-strings?" queried Beaton, turning the page. "Hughie may be sufficient for an aunt, but I hate to be too familiar with the fags. (By the way, does George or Charlie wash up for us, or do we shout for Harold?) . . . Hughie . . . Oh! his other handle is Caterham, I see . . . Caterham . . ."

"Yes. Rather a rabbit to look at . . . white-faced, nervous specimen."

"I know the palpitator," said Beaton, musing. "I remember, too, catching him alone in the changing-room one day. He'd been blubbing . . . It was near the beginning of term. I expect he's getting along all right now."

"The only thing I can think of," said Colquhoun, "that would be the least use, would be this . . . I might ask some decent fag of sturdier build to look after him a bit."

"You might do that," agreed Beaton. "Young Goss, for example. They fag together, and Goss seems more of a heart-of-oak, one of the bulldog breed and all that. I licked him yesterday for making a row. He took it like a Briton."

"He might do," said Colquhoun. "Well, at least we'll try. But I do wish that aunts wouldn't ask these things."

He tackled Goss that evening when the fag brought the clean cups back to the study. "I say, young 'un," he said cheerfully, "will you do me a favour?"

Goss, who was accustomed to receiving orders rather than requests, was taken aback.

"Yes, rather, Colquhoun," he stammered. "If I can, that is. . . ."

He stood in great awe of Colquhoun, but liked him, recognising worth and justice.

"It's this way," went on the captain. "There's a new kid, Caterham, here. Would you mind giving him a leg-up when you can? I know it will be rather a nuisance, but if you could manage it I'd be awfully obliged. He's rather a nervous kid, I fancy, and you might be able to do a bit for him."

"I'll try," said Goss modestly, flattered at being asked to do something for a great man. "I know him a bit as it is."

"Thanks," said Colquhoun. "I'm sure he'll appreciate it."

And so, for the time being, the incident closed. On mature consideration Goss felt rather at a loss to know how to set about his Samaritan duties. The knot was temporarily cut by an opportune hamper from home. Advice and offers of help may be unwelcome, but who ever heard of a chap being the worse for grub?

Caterham received a hunk of most excellent cake with surprised appreciation. "Thanks, awfully," he said, beginning to munch. "It's jolly good."

"A sound enough cake," declared Goss critically. "Our cook knows a thing or two. I say, you look pretty lost most of the time. Don't you like Dipcote?"

Caterham was in no mood to resent the accusation or the question. He was glad of a friendly conversation and appreciated the cake. "Oh, yes. . . ." he said evasively. "I like it all right. Only . . ." he stopped.

"Only what?" asked Goss, brushing up some crumbs of icing that were too good to waste.

"Nothing," said Caterham. "It doesn't matter." He closed his lips rather more tightly than was usual with him.

"I say, does anybody rag you?" asked Goss curiously. He could not fail to notice Caterham's cheerless aspect, and the Lower Study's habit was to go to the point direct.

"No . . . oh! No!" said Caterham hurriedly. "Only, I wish . . ." He broke off with a recurrence of his nervous manner. "It doesn't matter, anyhow. Thanks awfully for the cake."

"Have some more to-morrow," said Goss the sportsman. "That is," he added by way of precaution, "if there's any left to-morrow. And—and—I say . . ." he paused awkwardly. "If . . . if I can give you a—a leg-up any time, I will, like a shot."

To Goss's intense embarrassment Caterham's eyes filled with tears. Luckily they did not fall, so neither was shamed. "Thanks," said Caterham, gulping down his emotion. "I'd . . . I'd like it . . . but it wouldn't be any use . . . he wouldn't. . . ."

Suddenly he broke off, again closing his lips. The situation was relieved by the sound of the school bell summoning them to work. They walked across together in silence, Caterham dumbly grateful, Goss wondering what on earth the kid meant by his half-confidences and vague hints. At heart Goss was warmed by the knowledge of his own virtue and service to Colquhoun. The Olympian had stooped to ask a favour, which he, Goss, had granted.

And Colquhoun was a decent chap, though undeniably rigorous in the matter of the observation of rules.

Others beside Colquhoun were conscious of the atmospheric pressure. Watt had spent a pretty cheerless time since the beginning of term. Disappointed at the outset of the house captaincy promised by Chatham, he had not had the sense to recognise that circumstances alter cases, or the sportsmanship to subordinate himself to the good of the house. In some ways Watt was not half a bad sort, but he was proud, and keen to take the first place. More than once he had been sorry for his stupid quarrel with Colquhoun; but he had not been sorry enough to offer to shake hands. Instead he had withdrawn, in the first instance, to a position of comparative isolation. This proving exceedingly uncongenial, he had sought other friendships. Beaton being the natural complement to Colquhoun, Shawlands buried in books, Merrifield and Co. rather too junior, Watt was inevitably attracted towards the orbit of Clark and Wharton. The latter was dull enough and undistinguished, but at least he was a house monitor, one of the secondary stars. Clark was attractive and pleasant, and sure of his first fifteen colours before the end of term. Hence it followed that Watt's leisure hours soon came to be spent more and more in the company of Clark. But he was not satisfied. He knew

he was not getting the best that "the shop" could give him, yet he would take no steps to remedy things. By imperceptible degrees he grew slacker and began to lose touch.

He was honestly worried, too, by the prospect of football complications. Baker would be in the team next match. Should he put Clark back in the scrum, or drop Colquhoun? The final decision lay with him alone, but it was usual in doubtful matters to ask the opinion of old colours or Bax. He approached the latter first.

Mr. Baxendale was emphatic.

"If I were you I'd put Clark back in the scrum. He *can* be of great use to the pack. Colquhoun's only place is centre."

"He might go full back," suggested Watt tentatively, but without conviction.

Bax shook his head.

"Tufnell is too good to move. If Colquhoun leaves the three-quarter line, he'll have to go out altogether. But—apart from the purely football point of view—when things are as evenly balanced as this, school politics might suggest it better that he should stay."

"Isn't it my job to get the best fifteen?" asked Watt, rather doggedly.

Bax raised his eyebrows.

"Certainly. Only, one must remember that Colquhoun is an old colour, and Clark a very good

forward. Under the circumstances, I'd be inclined to put Clark back in the scrum."

Gaskell thought the same as Bax. Baker advocated a similar policy. Braithwaite was doubtful and non-committal. Tomlinson and Badger, forwards, the two remaining old colours, advised the dropping of Colquhoun, with the helpful corollary, "But, of course, it would be beastly bad luck." In school circles outside Chatham's Colquhoun was a popular figure without occupying the dizzy niche claimed by star athletes. The result of the plebiscite, then, on the whole, was in favour of the school captain keeping his place in the team. Watt in a sense felt almost resentful at the verdict. There was no reasonable doubt that Clark was the better centre: on the other hand, it was true he was a brilliant forward. School politics? Watt gritted his teeth. Be hanged to school politics! Thanks to them, he supposed, he had been done out of the promised house captaincy — out of the school captaincy that should have been his. Well, at least they had not been able to chouse him out of the footer skippering: at least he had the power and the right to say who should play for Dipcote and who not. It was not unpleasant to know that if he chose Colquhoun could lose his place. If he chose. . . . And football reasons would amply justify him in . . . in any decision he might make. . . .

"When will the O.D. team be out, old man?" asked Clark that night.

Watt tossed his head impatiently. Even now he did not discuss teams with Clark: he was jealous of his prerogatives, and Clark was not a colour . . . yet.

"Oh, in a day or two, I expect," he answered. "There are still a few points want settling."

CHAPTER XI

"HEARD the news?" asked Duckworth, with poorly-assumed carelessness.

"'Spec so," replied Blythe, countering with equal nonchalance. "You're always about three weeks behind the times. Why, if I asked you what day it was, you'd say it was Friday."

"And so it is," said Duckworth, staring. "It *is* Friday—and no Vergil, thank goodness."

"Listen to him!" said Blythe, appealing dramatically to Sands, who was leaning against the Lower Study mantelpiece, peacefully scorching. "Duckie doesn't even know when the Saturday half comes round! He *is* a dormouse!"

Sands intercepted Blythe's wink and observed "Golly! What a chap!"

Duckworth was seized with alarm.

"But it *is* Friday, isn't it?" he appealed. "I say, don't rag! If it's Saturday I'm done. I haven't opened a Vergil——"

Sands spoiled the situation by a laugh, and the crisis in Duckworth's soul passed.

"You silly ass!" he said, relieved. "For about

a second I half-believed you. Have you heard the news about Bax?"

"No. What's he done? Been jailed for getting drunk or cut his throat?"

"He's got scarlet fever," said Duckworth, conscious of exclusive information. "They took him off to the san just before breakfast."

"How did he manage to get it?" asked Sands.

"The Mut says he must have got it down town. You know he helps to run a club, or mission, or something, for townee kids. She thinks he caught it there. It's said there's a lot of it about the town just now."

"Poor old Bax," commented Blythe; "I hope he's not very bad." A celestial thought struck him and caused his face to shine. "I say! I wonder if they'll send us home! There's only another fortnight of term to go. That would be a frightful score."

"Not much chance," said Duckworth regretfully. "Don't you remember what happened when Dipcote got measles a year ago? Every one had to write home and ask his people if they wanted him to stay or go. Only about twenty chaps had sporting governors. The rest sent telegrams in wads saying, 'Keep the little brutes: glue them to the forms.' Much they cared if we lived or died. *I* know."

"Well, I hope Bax will soon be all right," said

Sands. "He's a decent chap. I wonder if they'll get somebody else here to take on his job till he's out again."

"We might have some larks if they do," observed Blythe thoughtfully. "And if they don't—Jove! Just fancy old Chatham running the house by himself! Just fancy! It's too good to hope for!"

The news was received with general regret, even by those answering to the name of hooligans, for Bax was universally popular. A few, of course, were malcontents or careless. Watt felt sorry for the team, for against men's clubs Bax was always included in the Dipcote pack. Against Ripswayd and other purely school sides, of course, a strictly school fifteen was played. Apart from this consideration, however, Watt had a vague and uneasy sense of relief. At present he was at odds with the world; and though against his will he had a deep respect for Bax, at heart he was not precisely sorry for Bax's temporary removal from the scene of activity. Merrifield was loud with genuine regrets: his panegyric of the scarlet victim evoked a sneer from Clark.

"Judging by the way you talk," said the man from New Zealand, "one would think Bax was a kind of demigod. To me he seems a pretty ordinary sort of chap."

"He's a jolly good sort," reiterated Merrifield, happy in his championing. "I only wish we'd a

few more like him at the shop. If we could poison Chatham and stick Bax in his place——"

"You might have to sit up even more than you do now," interrupted Clark. "What with Colquhoun on the permanent prowl and Bax upstairs, one might as well be in a girls' school."

"Colquhoun's not so bad," said Merrifield grudgingly. "In fact, I used to think him a good sort. But that poker business shook me up a little."

"Pretty hypocritical," agreed Clark. "I never did care much for the chap, but that business put the lid on it. I never heard of such an old-woman spoil-sport until I came here. By the way, can you lend me five bob for a few days?"

Merrifield looked surprised.

"Jove! I forked out seven-and-six only last Thursday! Haven't you had any luck?"

"Dead out," replied Clark carelessly. "Of course, one expects that sort of thing occasionally. One must take the rough with the smooth—kiddish to want fortune always on your side."

"I suppose so . . . You'll have to pull up a bit, old man, if this goes on. No good simply——"

"You're not going to come the Colquhoun touch on me?" suggested Clark, with a curl of the lip. "You might leave that sort of piffle to the virtuous apprentices. Of course, if you don't care to oblige me with a trifling five bob——"

"I didn't say that," said Merrifield. He hated to appear mean, and did not like being classed with the virtuous apprentices. "I'm not too flush myself this week, but I dare say I can manage it. . . . Let's see. . . ." He pulled a purse out of his pocket and counted the contents. "Seven-and-fourpence. . . . Right ho! here's five bob. But that leaves me beastly short."

"Your governor will stump up if you ask him. I only wish my governor was as sporting. Besides, even if yours did cut up rusty, there's always Monday to look forward to." He lowered his voice mysteriously and almost whispered. "It's real good stuff," he said a moment later, speaking aloud. "Real—good—stuff. I got the office from Jedbury, and if anybody ought to know, it's Jedbury."

"He's let us down once or twice," said Merrifield doubtfully. "Still, he was certainly on the spot three weeks ago. I only wish he'd be a bit more regular in his successes."

"Turn and turn about," said Clark, pocketing the two half-crowns proffered by Merrifield. "By the way, are you coming in to—er—grill to-night?"

Both laughed at the word "grill," though no joke was evident.

Merrifield nodded. "Yes, rather!" he said. "The usual lot, I suppose?"

"More or less. Well, prep's getting near. Let's go in and see if the O.D. team is out yet."

They walked along the corridor until they came in sight of the screen where house and school notices were displayed. A cluster of fags was standing round; in the midst was the figure of Watt, pinning up a sheet of paper. The work was done before they reached the screen, and Watt walked off to his study without a glance behind. At once ensued an anguished shoving, not unmixed with recrimination and abuse. The O.D. team was out at last.

"Don't squash, you goat! You're grinding my ribs out! Don't *squash!*"

"Squash yourself! I've as much right to see as——"

"Is Patmore in? And Cattermole?" (a sad voice from the outskirts).

"Cattermole's out! Beaton's in again!"

"Good old Beaton! I hope he sticks in this time!"

"Hal-*lo!* Colquhoun's out!—I say, you chaps! Colquhoun's out!"

"Colquhoun's out! (Don't SQUASH, you blighter!) Let's see. . . ."

"If you scrum so——" it was the voice of Blythe—"I'll biff you in the eye . . . Oh! awfully sorry, Clark! I didn't know it was you!"

"That's all right," said Clark pleasantly, looking over the heads of the fags and reading the notice. "H'm . . . Tufnell, Watt, Odgers, Baker——"

"You're in, Clark!"

"Am I? That's nice . . . Gaskell, Merrifield, Braithwaite . . . the usual lot. . . . No! they've brought in Beaton again. . . ."

A sudden silence fell on the group. Clark turned round and saw Colquhoun reading the notice. The captain's face did not change at all as he read: he knew that a dozen pairs of eyes were watching and observed the code.

"Bad luck, old man!" said Clark, with intentional clearness, ostentatiously effusive.

Colquhoun resented the "old man" from Clark no less than his lapse of taste in commenting at all. He did not smile, but answered easily enough, "Well, I'm glad Beaton is getting another show," without any evident emotion: "his weight will be needed to-morrow." Then he walked off.

"I say!" said a small and still very new fag. "Colquhoun is school captain, isn't he? Will he be chucked from that as well?"

The question evoked contemptuous laughter from the assembled throng. They discussed the situation freely, both before and during prep—by word of whisper or surreptitious notes. The fall of Colquhoun was not precisely a bolt from the blue: Baker's return had foreshadowed the possibility. But it was sensational enough to justify comment and further speculation. "He'll be jolly sick,"

was the general verdict, with the rider "Poor beast! It's rough, but . . . he's not so good as old Clark." The latter's approachableness had earned him the "old" that was denied to Colquhoun.

The popular verdict hit the mark. Colquhoun was jolly sick, both on account of his footer downfall and the manner thereof. It is not a slight, nor a very frequent, thing to drop an old colour in favour of an uncapped newcomer. But the dropping need involve no shame, provided the old colour has done his best. No sting need be left in the wound that is necessary for the team's benefit. Colquhoun knew that. But he knew, too, that in such a case the decent thing is for the captain to tell the fallen colour personally before the list goes up. "Awfully sorry, old chap, but I'm afraid we've got to play So-and-So next match instead of you. Beastly rough." A little thing, but part of the code. The break with tradition was not to be wondered at, considering the circumstances, but it emphasised the rift in the lute, the widening breaches in Chatham's house, the sense of failure in his term of office. Colquhoun certainly was "jolly sick."

Later, Beaton essayed comfort. "Rough luck," he said, dropping his usual manner. "I see they've put me in again—goodness knows why. I wish I could swop, but wishing is no use."

"Thanks," said Colquhoun gratefully. "It's no good grousing . . . Hullo! Come in!"

The door opened and admitted Shawlands.

"I say!" he began apologetically. "Sorry to bother you, but there's a little matter that I think ought to be settled."

"Anything up?" asked the captain. "Take a pew."

Shawlands sat down on the edge of the table.

"I wanted to go into Clark's study for a book just now. Watt works there usually, you know, and he'd taken my fair-copy book by mistake. Well, I couldn't get in."

"Door locked?" asked Beaton, with interest.

"I don't know. The handle turned but wouldn't grip. I heard somebody talking and called out. There was a laugh and a 'Go away! We're working.' I told 'em I wanted the book, but they laughed again and said: 'Don't bother!' So I came away."

"H'm . . ." said Colquhoun. "This needs looking into. . . . D'you mind me handling it?"

"That's what I came for," said Shawlands. "Door won't open, and a house monitor is told not to bother. I prefer to bother."

Beaton looked at the valiant swot with something like envious approval.

"Strenuous lad!" he said. "Shall I come too, Collie, to lend moral support and all that? You may need it."

"Don't worry," answered the captain. "I

think I can manage it." He grinned faintly. "If I can't, I'll shout for help."

He left the study, Shawlands and Beaton waiting hopefully with the door open. When he reached Clark's study Colquhoun paused. There was a confused sound of laughter and noise within, but nothing could be heard distinctly. The captain knocked sharply and silence fell. He knocked again. No answer. Colquhoun tried the door handle. It turned, as Shawlands said, without gripping. Then at last he raised his voice and said, "I want to come in. It's me—Colquhoun." There seemed to be whispering and a shuffling sound. Presently the voice of Clark said, "Right ho!" The handle rattled: the door opened. Before him Colquhoun saw Wharton, Clark, Merrifield, and Cole, apparently at work. Text-books, proses, fair copies and the like profusely strewed the table. Clark stood in an attitude of polite interest. "D'you want anything?" he asked suavely.

"Yes," said the captain quietly. "I want to know why the door's locked. It's dead against rules for study doors to be locked or bolted."

"It's neither," said Clark. "As it happens, the handle on the inside is out of order. Sometimes it falls off—as you see—and the bar between drops out. We're so busy working that we don't always notice it."

There was a smothered laugh from Cole. With

that exception the company was silent, gravely interested.

Colquhoun glanced at the door handle and saw that the excuse *might* be made to hold water. . . . Apparently they were at work. For the time being he could do nothing. He bit his lip.

"You'd better get that handle mended soon," he said. "Otherwise . . ."

"Yes?" said Clark, with quiet insolence. "Yes?"

"Otherwise," said the captain, "I shall have to see to it myself."

"We'd hate to trouble you," Clark assured him. "Er—is that all? Then I think, you men, we might as well get back to work. . . ."

This time it was Merrifield who sniggered.

Colquhoun left the room.

CHAPTER XII

It was the custom, when visiting teams came to play Dipcote, for the football captain and secretary to meet them at the station. Originally instituted for reasons of practical utility—in other words, to show the quickest route—as much as for courtesy, the custom was observed even in the case of the Old Dipcotian team. Consequently, when the 12.15 train steamed into the station, Watt and Braithwaite were ready on the platform to act as mentors and representatives. A third saloon compartment, from which tobacco smoke was not absent, disgorged a bunch of cheerful, greatcoated O.D.'s, mostly men down for the university vac, with a sprinkling of young business men collected from a radius of fifty miles. Tarbet, who had skippered last year's Dipcote fifteen, and was now supposed to be a "sitter" for a Blue next season, came forward with a grin of recognition.

"Hello, Watt!" he said. "Here we are. I'm captaining the side to-day. How's the shop?"

"Going strong," replied Watt, relieving Tarbet of his bag. "Your train's up to time. Have you brought down a full side?"

"Three short. A centre and two forwards. Can you give us any decent subs—not the usual cast-offs from the third?"

"Oh, we'll manage that all right. There are several "eighth men" swopping about in the scrum this year. Burton and Wilmot—Burton was well up in the second last year, you'll remember. And you can have Colquhoun as centre."

"Is that a young brother of Collie? I didn't know he had——"

"No. It's Collie himself. We've had to drop him this match. A new man, Clark, has suddenly appeared."

"H'm . . . he must be useful," commented Tarbet, as they walked along. "Bad luck on old Collie: he was a good sort. But it's the fortune of war. How's Bax?"

"Laid up with scarlet. You'll have a few stone less to shove against to-day."

"Good business," said Tarbet comfortably, but without malicious intent. "I had a hand-off from Bax in September, when I played for Saunders' scratch. I haven't forgotten it yet."

In due course Dipcote was reached. The O.D.'s filled in the quarter of an hour before dinner by reviving old memories. They "fed" *en bloc* in the School House, but went to their respective houses for changing purposes. The match was timed to begin at 2.15, and at two o'clock the

major part of both teams was on the playground, punting about, embarrassed by the attentions of junior Dipcotians, avid of nods from football lights, whose names they read in the sporting news—avid, also, of stray punts whenever a ball happened to come their way.

Colquhoun and Beaton walked over together from Chatham's just before the game was due.

"This," observed Beaton, "is where the writer of school yarns would seize his chance with both hands. It's a top-hole situation, Collie. Act I (passed by the film censor): 'Dropped from the Team; or, The Hope of His Side.' Act II: 'Vindication: the Captain Scores the Winning Try.' Act III: 'See the Conquering Hero Comes; or, The Pride of His House Once More!' Thrills are cheap to-day."

Colquhoun grunted, but made no other reply. It was something to be playing for the O.D.'s, but . . . if only he had been playing against them, in his old place!

"All the same," pursued Beaton, "I'm not rotting altogether. If the fates ordain that you play a hot game and Clark a poor one, we might have the pleasure of seeing Clark back in the scrum next week. Another point . . . I understand you're playing left centre. That means you're marking old pal Clark."

"Don't be an ass," growled the captain.

Beaton was unruffled.

"Far be it from me to suggest violence," he purred amiably. "As somebody observes, 'Force is no remedy,' and I am a peaceful citizen. All the same, if you *should* contrive to trample on Clark's most vulnerable parts, I shouldn't grieve."

Colquhoun laughed, well knowing that Beaton was the most clean-playing sportsman that Dipcote could wish. He meant in his heart to play the best game of his life. If chance came, he meant to tackle Clark vigorously. None the less, he made no resolve to play a clean game himself, simply because he could not have stooped to even the tiniest of dirty tricks. A few moments later they arrived at the ground. The teams lined up: the whistle blew; and the O.D. match began.

It was an ideal day for football. The ground was firm, the turf springy and soft. There had been no rain or snow or hail for a week. No bright sunshine dazzled the eyes to cumber the hands: the sky was grey but clear. There was not a breath of wind, and the field was almost as level as a table. Obviously it was a day for fast and open play, with plenty of passing among the backs. The gallery rejoiced exceedingly, for, although you can find defenders of hard scrumming, donkey-work, and mud-larking, the "handling code" is certainly seen at its best and brightest when there is a chance of its justifying its journalistic name.

Dipcote kicked off and Tarbet caught the ball fair and true. He punted high and followed up. Baker saved nobly, and a scrum was formed. The O.D.'s, knowing that the School was sure to be better trained, hoped to use their weight and wider experience to pile up a score in the first half. Then, when legs tired and wind grew scanty, they could rest content with a defensive policy. "*Shove*, O.D.'s!" commanded Tarbet, and they shoved to some effect. By sheer weight they overran (not hooked) the ball. It went out to Tarbet on the wing. He gained ten yards and passed to Jenkins. The latter jinked and dashed for the line. Some fifteen yards from it he sent a fast, but excellent pass to Colquhoun. For no apparent reason—unless that the chance of a certain score paralysed him—Colquhoun knocked on and the chance was lost.

A sigh of relief went up from the crowd.

From the ensuing scrum Dipcote broke away with the ball at their toes, carrying the game back almost to half-way before Pott, the left wing, saved. Then followed a touch, a throw-out, exchange of punts, and touch again. From the line-out an O.D. forward knocked the ball back to Jenkins. He slung it out to Colquhoun. Again the school captain mulled the pass, and again the scrum formed down. Dipcote hooked neatly this time, and Gaskell sent Merrifield away with a

glorious pass. The stand-off slung the ball to Odgers, who gave to Baker. Then Clark got possession and dropped for goal. The shot was not bad, but the ball fell short. The O.D. back, Palmer, returned without finding touch. Watt secured, and had a lightning dash down the line. At the critical moment he passed to Clark. Colquhoun was marking closely and was on the Dipcote centre almost simultaneously with the ball. It was not a low tackle that he attempted: the O.D. line was near and all possibility of a pass must be prevented. Clark was simply smothered by his heavier opponent, and again there was a scrum.

"Good man!" said Tarbet, as Colquhoun disengaged and fell back. "That's better." Colquhoun knew that he spoke the truth and was glad. His two mulled passes had galled him deeply. As a rule, he had the safest pair of hands; and on this day, when he was especially anxious to retrieve himself, he had so far made a worse show than usual. But there was not much time left for thinking. The next moment Merrifield picked up the ball from the very toes of the O.D.'s. "*Ya-hoop!*" from the ropes; and then at once, in a minor key, "*O-oohh!*" Merrifield had passed out to Clark, who passed again—in theory—to Baker. But Jenkins had nipped in and intercepted. He flashed down towards the Dipcote goal, Tarbet well up, Dipcote toiling painfully behind. Odgers

was left with two men to mark. Rightly, he went for the man with the ball. "*Got 'im!*" howled the townee portion of the ropes; but they howled too soon. Odgers certainly got Jenkins, but by that time the ball was in Tarbet's hands. Tufnell flung himself at the flying wing—too late! The try was scored between the posts and converted. Dipcote was five points down.

They re-started with grim determination, resolved to wipe out the stain. By this time the O.D.'s were a little blown, and for the next ten minutes Colquhoun had visions of Number Eight boots and little else. "Dribble! dribble! Use your feet!" shouted Watt, and the forwards used them to some effect. Colquhoun seemed always to be the man whose duty it was to go down to the ball, and he did his duty with faithfulness. His saving was excellent. Despite a certain amount of wear-and-tear he began to feel that he was doing his job, making a success of this game that had begun so badly. Saving is not spectacular, but the trained observer knows its value. And if only another chance came his way, to show that he *could* take a hard pass. . . . The chance came, as if in answer to his wish. His rival, Clark, punted high and raced for the fall. Colquhoun stood steady as a rock, sure of himself, cool and unperturbed. He knew he had just time to catch the ball and dodge . . . he marked the place on the

touch line whither he meant to punt it back. And then, after all, again he dropped it. . . .

His bitterness of soul was of short duration. Clark, going great guns, charged him down the fraction of a second later. Unable to stop himself if he had wished, or even to jink (and what Clark wished only Clark knows), the brilliant centre crashed into the Dipcote skipper. Both went down, but only one rose. Clark was the man who stood up, and he rubbed his head dizzily.

"Jove!" he said, rather weakly, and then the referee, seeing Colquhoun lying still, blew his whistle. "Man hurt," he said, and the teams gathered round.

"It's my knee," said Colquhoun, gritting his teeth. "Wh—ew!"

Pott was a medical in his third year. He knelt down and felt with practised hands. The skipper groaned. Pott shook his head. "Have to go off," he said: "knee gone. Water. Now, then, lift him gently, you chaps."

"Stick me on the touch line," said Colquhoun faintly. "I'll be all right in a bit." But he went white, and could not altogether suppress another groan of pain. "No good," said Pott briefly. "This won't be a short job. Better get him across to the house." The stricken centre was carried to the touch line. The game was resumed, while others took Colquhoun across. Arrived at

Chatham's, he was laid on a sofa and the doctor telephoned for. He corroborated Pott. "A fortnight at least without moving," was the verdict, "and almost certainly no more football this season. Lucky it's the end of the term. And there's scarlet fever in the sanatorium. . . . H'm."

. . . The O.D. game resulted in a win for the School by sixteen points to five. Weakened by the loss of a centre, and handicapped by inferior training, the O.D.'s were fighting against odds the rest of the game. Watt scored twice for the School, Clark once, and one try was notched by Beaton after a very creditable dribble that surprised himself as much as anybody. Odgers converted two tries. Baker failed with one, Braithwaite with one. The usual cheers for both sides concluded an amicable contest.

Watt for the time being was happy. He had captained a good side well. His retention of Clark and exclusion of Colquhoun had been justified on the day's play. Colquhoun had been patchy; while Clark, without achieving his usual brilliance, had been very good.

As Beaton was leaving the ground with Taunton, a Campbellite forward, he was stopped by a rather highly-coloured individual in seedy tweeds.

"Is Mr. Clark comin' orf soon, sir?" he inquired.

Beaton stared.

"Clark? I saw him go up into the School House. He may be some time—I don't know."

"Sorry I can't wait," said the H.C.I. hoarsely, "but I'm bloomin' pressed for time. Might I arsk you to give 'im a message?"

"Right ho," said Beaton. "What's the message?"

"Flannelette or Monkey Nuts," said the H.C.I.

"I *beg* your pardon?" said the astonished Beaton.

"Flannelette or Monkey Nuts," repeated the stranger. Then, with a wink that conveyed nothing to Beaton, he disappeared. In a state of stupefaction Beaton walked over to Chatham's, repeating the mysterious words. At Chatham's he inquired for Colquhoun. It seemed that the captain was in Chat's study, where Beaton was presently admitted. He found Colquhoun still in his footer togs, bandaged and in pain, with some news.

"I'm to lie still for a fortnight good," he said. "The san's isolated, and it seems there's no sense in my lying here for the last fortnight of term, doing nothing. I'm going home to-night."

"*Home!* You're drunk," said Beaton. "How are they going to get you there?"

"Motor ambulance. It's only thirty miles, you know. I shall be going in an hour or two, I expect."

"Rough luck," said Beaton sympathetically. "But you'll be back next term all right, of course."

"I hope so. Add five weeks' holiday on to this fortnight—that ought to be good enough. I say, old man——" Colquhoun hesitated, and then went on, "I say . . . you'll have to carry on as well as you can by yourself."

"Don't you worry," said Beaton. "I'll do what I can. I say, here's something to make you laugh. I scored a try this afternoon. Me! Me, myself! Without anybody showing me!"

"Good man," said the captain, smiling. "Score some more. In the House, if you can."

Colquhoun departed at 5.30. Preparation was spent by Beaton in deep thought, but not upon Tacitus. He went up to his dormitory before the lights were out that night and summoned Goss. "Kid!" he said impressively. "Till further notice wake me at six o'clock. I'm thinking—*thinking*, mind you—of doing a little training."

CHAPTER XIII

A WEEK before the end of term Caterham might have been observed slinking into Chatham's house at 12.40. In his arms he carried a large brown paper parcel, which contained certain purchases he had just made down town. After turning into the long corridor he hurried on, being lucky in finding no one there. A moment later, just as he had almost reached his goal, Wharton came out of his study and brushed against him. Caterham gasped with unnecessary nervousness, for Wharton took no notice. After waiting a few seconds to make sure no one else was coming, Caterham made a dash for the cave. He earthed safely, descended the steps, and found Goss on sentry duty. "Who goes there?" asked Goss, in a hoarse whisper.

"*Pussy pig!*" breathed Caterham, and was allowed to advance.

In the cave proper he found the remaining members of the Society of Raggers, who rose impressively, each raising his right hand in the air—a sort of Masonic ritual invented by Blythe.

"Who comes?" demanded the president.

Again the mystic password was uttered—this time

by Goss—and the company, with the exception of Caterham, resumed their seats.

The president spoke again.

"Has the new candidate done his job—er—I mean, performed the test of skill?"

"He has," answered Goss, who was standing sponsor.

"Did he do it secretly without being twig—observed?"

"I was nearly spotted," broke in Caterham. "While I was in the shop a beak went by, but——"

"Silence, candidate!" commanded the president, frowning. "Brother Goss, if you can answer for him—say he's O.K. and all that—we will proceed with the initiation."

Goss, having vouched for Caterham in due form, the rites of initiation began. The novice was placed in the centre of the cave, while the five original members joined hands in a circle round him. Then, solemnly pacing, they chanted in low tones the Club Anthem—composed by Blythe in what he described as his spare time, but which was officially labelled "Latin Prose." The anthem ran as follows—

"We are the Society of Raggers—
The Society of Raggers—
The Society of Raggers—
Our object is"—(now Pet, old man!)

Pettigrew chanted *solus*—

"'The ragging of beaks——' and—you next, Goss."

"'The ragging of monitors——' you next, Chut."

"'The ragging of house monitors——' Duckie."

"'The ragging of jades——' Sands, buck up."

"'And the general ragging of Dipcote——' all together, you chaps!"

The society joined in heartily—

"Cheeroh for the Society of Raggers!
Cheeroh! Cheeroh! Cheer!"

Then the five bowed solemnly towards the novice, paced in stately fashion once more around him, and sat down crosslegged on the floor.

Pettigrew took up the tale—

"Candidate, do you promise to be true to the society? To do everything that the society demands without making fussy objections? To crawl on your hands and knees whenever the society thinks it a good wheeze? To——"

"Yes!" gulped Caterham, by this time a complete wreck.

"Good. Then you're now a member of the society. Dash! there's first bell! We'll have to hurry. Got the stuff?"

Caterham indicated the parcel.

Pettigrew nodded approval.

"I'll stow it in a secret place till prep time.

We'll distribute them at 6.15. Everything's arranged. All the chaps know what to do. (By the way, don't forget that Buxton and Herepath haven't dubbed up yet. They swear they'll pay on Saturday.) I'm to give the signals. Baxter is to do the first palaver—then Horton."

"But are all the Lower Study members of the society?" asked Caterham, bewildered.

"Of course not," said Blythe. "And you mustn't breathe a word of it to anybody. We shouldn't have let you in unless Goss had been so keen. All the Lower Study knows is that we—or Pettigrew, rather—has thought out one of the best rags of the year. And 'cos he planned it, they're taking their orders from him. Mind! Not a word! There goes the second bell."

The society adjourned in the usual manner, Caterham with a delighted sense of mystery and awe. He felt that at last he was beginning to be somebody—a member of Dipcote in good earnest—not merely the rawest of new kids, an Ishmael on the face of the earth.

The rest of the day passed without incident. At 7.30 the bell went for prep, and Shawlands made ready for a long vigil. The usual arrangement was for a house monitor to take about twenty minutes of preparation until Bax or Chatham came in. But no substitute for Bax had been found for the last fortnight of the term. An undergraduate from

the local university (Dipcote has a small and very new university, which the School scorns by reason of its own four-hundred-year traditions) was taking Baxendale's work in school. But Mr. Chatham thought himself competent to run his house alone for a fortnight: if necessary, a new junior house master could take temporary duty next term. This in effect made little difference to Chatham. He did not increase the number of his attendances at preparation: instead, he merely told the house monitors to take the whole evening, thereby proving that Greek Particles need not stunt strategic grasp of difficult situations.

Shawlands came in with a pile of books under his arm. Whispering ceased, books were opened and work began. Shawlands, after ten minutes' luxurious leaning on the mantelpiece, hardened his heart and left the genial warmth. He walked up the room and sat down at the head of one of the tables. Glancing round to make sure there was no patent slacking, after five minutes he became absorbed in the *Antigone*. He was a swot, you may remember, and really enjoyed a Greek play. Rumour had it that he even worked in the holidays. The House had rather a negative attitude towards him: he was not much *known*, for as yet (save in the recent instance of Clark's study) there had been no attempt to disobey or disregard his few and routine-marked orders. To-night the behaviour of the Lower

Study was exceptionally good—so good that it might have aroused suspicion in one more guileful than Shawlands. No whispers were heard—not a single surreptitious kick was given—no "aid" was sought—all was silent as the grave. Yet every now and then watches were consulted: more than once appealing eyes were turned upon Pettigrew, but always (like the eldest Oyster) he shook his heavy head. The time was not yet ripe.

At 7.55 Pettigrew surveyed the scene in calm triumph. His forces had not failed—had not betrayed him by a single laugh or meaning cough. He looked over towards Shawlands. All serene: the spectacled house monitor was hunting for a word in the dictionary. He found it, and pressed on with his work. The next moment all eyes turned to Pettigrew, begging in silent agony. The leader nodded. Quietly, without any noise worth mentioning, every member (except two!) of the Lower Study took something from under his coat and made a certain change in his appearance. Then, apparently, work was resumed—busy, earnest, silent, good, persevering work. Discipline and self-control held good.

For about ten minutes more Shawlands pursued his *Antigone* with zest. Then he happened to glance up and his gaze travelled round the room. His heart almost stopped beating for a moment, so sudden was the surprise, so incongruous, so utterly

shocking. His jaw dropped: he was about to speak, when Buxton came up with a request. Might he go and get a drink of water? Shawlands gazed on him earnestly and with internal relief, for Buxton looked quite normal. While Buxton's person was between the monitor and the rest of the Lower Study, while Shawlands' attention was momentarily diverted, the Lower Study unanimously made a swift and silent change. Something was hidden beneath each coat in the jiffiest of jiffies. As Buxton closed the door behind him, Shawlands gazed vacantly round upon his charges. Stupefied with dire amazement, he noted that each boy looked perfectly ordinary, perfectly usual, perfectly human, busy with his work. Yet, a moment ago he could have sworn that . . . that . . . Had he almost fallen asleep over the *Antigone?* Could he have been dreaming? He pinched himself to make sure that he was awake.

Obedient to a wink from Pettigrew, Horton advanced with a Xenophon.

"I can't make this out," said Horton meekly. "D'you mind giving me a hand, please, Shawlands?" It was a common thing for the monitor to help distressed juniors, and Shawlands bent over the book to unravel the perplexity. While so engaged, some thirty odd hands again sought their owners' coats, again produced Somethings, again adjusted Them, and waited in hopeful silence.

"HIS LEG WAS BEING PULLED!"

Horton, his difficulties removed, with profuse thanks, returned to his seat. Shawlands, feeling his sanity clarified and assured by human speech, looked up. . . . Again his heart bumped his ribs, but now it was more from indignation than from fears for his mental health or vision. This time there could be no doubt about it: his leg was being pulled! He must vindicate his authority speedily. Yet for a moment he paused to take in the full effect of a sight that probably was unique in Dipcote. Before him, apparently immersed in work, without a giggle or a restless movement, sat the Lower Study, each boy wearing one of those cardboard masks wherewith we celebrate the Fifth of November. The effect of some thirty solemn juniors, whose visages vied with each other in horrific and contorted ugliness, can be better imagined than described.

Shawlands spoke clearly. "Take off those masks!"

The Lower Study obeyed with a roar of laughter that had been bottled up to bursting point.

The house monitor waited for it to die down, and then: "Preparation will go on for an extra quarter of an hour. Don't let this occur again or there will be trouble."

His voice was firm enough, though inwardly he was trembling. But his appearance was against him: the Lower Study at present only saw in him the Swot trying to assert an empty authority. Discipline was tottering. Bax and Colquhoun had

gone: Watt and Wharton had not seemed to bother all the term. Beaton (whose training was only a few days' old) was a genial slacker. Why should the Lower Study pay much heed to Shawlands? They had conquered men apparently stronger than he ere this.

Lorimer voiced the public opinion by giving a contemptuous whistle.

"Lorimer, go to my study and wait for me!" said Shawlands quietly; but he gripped the table hard.

"Sorry, but I'm busy," laughed Lorimer, who was a big youth over fifteen. He was an inch taller than the house monitor.

The Lower Study hummed approval.

"Lorimer, you know what will happen if you defy a house monitor," said Shawlands.

"What?" asked Lorimer, in a voice he meant to be careless. But he felt a little uneasy: this was not quite what he had expected.

Shawlands took out his watch deliberately.

"If you aren't in my study within two minutes, I shall go to Mr. Chatham," he announced.

An electric shock pervaded the room. This sounded like business, as indeed it was.

Lorimer was in a painful situation. If Shawlands fulfilled his threat, he (Lorimer) ran the risk of a hot time. For Chatham, though he hated to be bothered, could lick very effectively upon due cause. If, on the other hand, Lorimer gave ground,

he was disgraced in the eyes of the Lower Study. Either way he was in the cart.

"One minute gone," announced Shawlands quietly. Murmurs ceased. . . .

"One minute and a half gone," said the time-keeper. All eyes were fixed on Lorimer. "Twenty-five seconds more . . . twenty . . . fifteen . . . ten. . . ."

Lorimer rose in a sort of daze and made an ungraceful exit.

Shawlands followed, knitting his brows. . . .

Outside the study he saw Lorimer waiting.

"Go in," said Shawlands, and Lorimer obeyed.

Shawlands went in on his heels and found Watt working. "I say!" said Shawlands, a little nervously, "I have to lick this chap. Do you mind——?"

Ordinary etiquette demanded that Watt should have said "Righto," and bustled out, avoiding the embarrassment of the expectant victim's eyes. But Watt looked up as if something unheard of was on the carpet.

"Lick him?" he repeated. "Anything up?"

"Pulling my leg in prep," said Shawlands shortly. "The Lower Study put masks on for my benefit."

Watt laughed, and Lorimer took heart.

"Won't you have to lick the lot, then?" suggested Watt.

Shawlands was surprised. He hardly suspected Watt of wanting to put a spoke in his wheel . . . yet; but . . . this was scarcely a helpful attitude.

"I'm keeping them all in," he said, blinking behind his spectacles. "I'm going to lick this chap for giving me cheek in addition."

"Oh . . . well . . ." said Watt, shrugging his shoulders. The words were little in themselves, but the attitude and tone were disloyal. Plainly he thought Lorimer rather harshly used. "I suppose you want me to clear out for a few minutes?"

Shawlands looked at him curiously for three seconds. "Yes, please," he said. Watt gathered up a few books and left the study. Shawlands took up a cane from the corner. Lorimer noted with alarm that it seemed lithe and stingy. Should he rebel? He could easily "down" the Swot; but . . . Chatham . . . possibly, even the Old Man . . .

"Bend over," said Shawlands.

"I . . . I say!" began Lorimer.

"Yes?"

"Nothing," said Lorimer, and bent over the table.

Lorimer's next observation was "*Yip!*" It was wrung from his reluctant lips by the discovery that the Swot could hit, and hit to some purpose . . .

. . . "Fourteen!" was Lorimer's report to the Lower Study. "*Fourteen!* . . . and they stung like sin!"

CHAPTER XIV

The last few days of the Christmas term passed slowly to boys and "beaks" alike, anxious for the holidays and possible skating. There came frost enough to harden the ground, but not enough for frozen, bearing ponds. The "bone" in the playing fields prevented football and fostered a slackness that did not encourage peace. Superfluous steam can be blown off in hard footer—in "runs," too, for that matter. But organising runs at the fag-end of term is not an enthusiastic business. As like as not there will be a good deal of shirking, and there was a good deal in Chatham's. Beaton made various efforts, meeting with a little success in hounding out reluctant fags for cross-country treks, and Shawlands backed him up to the best of his power. But two fellows are not enough to act as organisers, beaters, and whips every day. There will always be a number of laggards who, even if they are made to turn out, will drop behind and take short cuts home, being careful to walk so as not to arrive too soon. The studies presented an attitude of passive or active resistance. Watt, Clark, Wharton, and Merrifield openly laughed at

Beaton's new-found enthusiasm, and made cheap jokes about the halo they claimed to see hovering over his head. The others quietly kept out of the way.

As yet there was no open rebellion against law and order. Shawlands' decisive action in the case of Lorimer had momentarily checked any flagrant flouting of authority. Not that the fire had been definitely put out: the embers smouldered and were ready to break into a flame on the least provocation. Lorimer sulked, vowing indefinite and vague revenge. He had some influence, too, in the Lower Study, and lost no opportunity of breeding discontent and opposition. Watt's failure to back up Shawlands had added another straw to the load: it was commonly believed among the fags that the footer captain had sympathised with Lorimer. It was even reported for a time that Shawlands had been snubbed (in private) for tactless handling of a harmless joke. This did not make the Swot's position any easier: he was the sensitive type that feels disapproval, but has the pluck to disregard it and follow the gleam, upholding the code. His threat of "sneaking" to Chatham had been an unfortunate necessity—necessary, because the monitor who is defied *must* appeal to a "beak" or another monitor. It would have been wiser if he had threatened to call in Beaton first, but Shawlands had been obliged to

act on the spur of the moment. He had threatened Chatham because his housemaster leapt to his mind. Having threatened, he wisely stuck to his guns. But juniors (and sometimes even seniors) do not take kindly to the mailed fist within the velvet glove, no matter how thick the velvet may be.

"I wish," observed Beaton, looking up from a classical work he was dipping into, "that this term was done with. I shan't be sorry when the holidays start."

He and Shawlands were "consulting original authorities" in the school library. The time was between 4.30 and lock-up.

"Same here," agreed Shawlands, leaning back and yawning comfortably. "But I'm not looking forward to next term, unless Colquhoun is back. Didn't some one get a letter from him to-day? I heard a rumour——"

"Chatham did and showed it me. Not much in it. His knee's pretty bad, and the doctor won't fix a date . . . Yes . . . if he doesn't turn up soon next term, we virtuous youths will have a long row to hoe. I don't like it, friend Shawlands: I am not enamoured of the situation. . . . The House, in the words of a thousand croakers, is going to the dogs, sir—to the dogs—to the asterisk bow-wows. (Crib from Dickens: look up Mr. Mantalini *passim*.)"

"I will," said Shawlands, smiling. Of late a distinct feeling of sympathy had been growing up

between the oddly assorted pair—the result of a common purpose. "As a matter of fact, I don't think things very bad yet . . . but there's thunder in the air. . . . Watt isn't any help."

"He used to be a decent chap," mused Beaton. "When we played together on the green as children he always shared his marbles and plum-cake. We might have been brothers. And now . . . it's the contaminating society of that rotten apple, Clark. . . . It doesn't do the House any good. By the way, have you lighted upon any more locked doors lately? No? I did once. At least, it was sort of locked. The bar wasn't out this time, but they admitted they'd had a chair under the handle to keep out intruders—'fellows kept pestering them so.' Oh, everything looked serene. They assumed the virtue of industry, though I'd bet my shirt, not forgetting the marking-tape, that they had it not."

"Did you do anything?" asked Shawlands, with interest.

"I told them I should pester them much more if they obstructed traffic in any way in the future. One could hardly search the study for concealed brandy-bottles, or whatever their pet vice may be, on mere suspicion. But I let 'em understand that it was a last warning. Next time they'd get reported. No: Watt wasn't there. Only Clark, Wharton, Lutworth, and Merrifield. Pity about Merry, because he seems rather a decent chap at

heart. Still, if a house monitor like Wharton, and a prospective monitor like Clark, do these things, we can't expect a strenuous view of life from Merrifield and Lutworth."

"Or the Lower Study."

"Or the Lower Study," agreed Beaton. "The fags are becoming infected with the virus. Either that, or they're taking to Socialism. I begin to notice a comradely attitude that galls me horribly. . . . The tea-cups are washed (or rather half-washed) as a sort of personal favour, judging by recent demeanours I've noticed. The Lower Study doesn't spring as smartly to attention as it used—doesn't strain at the leash to do one's lightest bidding. And I've caught several of them out of bounds in the past week—more of them than is warranted by the approach of the festive season."

"I met Merry and Cole barely inside bounds the other day. They looked so pleased and self-conscious that I could swear they'd just escaped being nabbed. But what can one do?"

"Keep one's eyes skinned and that's all," said Beaton, stretching luxuriously. "It's a poorish outlook for us who hold the fort, eh?"

Shawlands felt a thrill of pleasure at being verbally included in the fortress-holders. He was framing a suitable reply when the library door opened and Price came in, some books and papers under his arm.

"Hello!" said Beaton courteously. "You on the track of the Simple Life too? Come in—come in—this is a public place within the meaning of the act. Draw in your stool: fill your pipe from granfer's pouch, and call for a mug of ale. Have you a yule log in your pocket by any chance? Excuse me, but I feel so Christmassy that I can't help running on."

Price grinned.

"I came over to do a little work," he said, sitting down. "There's such a row in our study that it's hopeless. Merry is brewing with Cole and Lut, and Clark has come in to lend a hand."

"It doesn't sound like a working party," said Beaton. "I suppose at the best of times you're a fairly hot crowd in the big study. Don't take life too seriously — enjoying yourselves while you're young, and having the very dickens of a good time and all that."

Price grinned again, but this time rather dolefully.

"I don't mind ragging occasionally," he said, nursing a knee. "But those chaps want to rag all the time. It wasn't so bad at the beginning of term; but lately, somehow, things have got a bit too thick. Even in prep——" He stopped suddenly.

"Even in prep?" suggested Beaton. There was no response, so the monitor made use of the

Direct Question. "What do they *do* all the time? One can't rag for ever."

"Oh . . . rotting about . . ." said Price. "You know how chaps *do* rot about."

Beaton did not press him, guessing, perhaps, that Price was not the man to give away a study-chum to a monitor, however irksome (or worse) the "rotting about" might be. There was silence for a minute or so, and then Shawlands said suddenly, "Why don't you come and work in my study when you want to? There's plenty of room."

"Thanks, awfully," said Price. "But what about Watt? Would he like——?"

"Watt goes to Clark's study every night now, and most afternoons. That needn't worry you."

"And if it does," said Beaton, taking up the poker and jabbing idly at the fire, "you can hike off into mine."

Price flushed at the compliment. He was a study-man, it was true. But Beaton was an Olympian, and his invitation was a distinct tribute.

"That's awfully decent of you chaps," he said. "I think I will. Thanks awfully, Beaton."

"Oh, pleasure . . . pleasure!" said Beaton. "Of course, I can't answer for Colquhoun when he comes back, though I don't suppose he'll care a hang. He's a good chap. As a matter of fact, I'm living rather a lonely life just now and should be glad of even the boot-boy's company. Not that

that means any reflection on you," he added gracefully, waving the poker. "Merely an illustration of my blighted youth."

"I say!" said Price, turning to him. "Is it true you're in strict training? Fellows are talking about it."

"Fellows *will* talk," said Beaton apologetically. "You can't stop them. There *is* something in the gossip. I only sleep under six blankets now, instead of eight. I have cut down my wine allowance to a mere half-bottle a day, and a couple of cigars seems only to whet my passion for the weed. My doctor suggested chewing raisins to take my mind off tobacco; but they're poor comfort to a man who enjoys—enjoyed, I mean—his churchwarden filled full and frequent. Don't let's talk of it. You're too young to understand."

Price laughed and got up.

"Well," he said, "if I'm going to do any work it's time I started. Thanks awfully for the study proposition. I'll certainly come."

"Do," said Beaton, rising too. "I'm going over to the House. Are you coming, Shawlands?"

They went across together in the frosty dusk in silence.

After a while Shawlands said, "I've not seen much of Price, but I think I shall try to now. He seems a decent chap."

"Seems sound," agreed Beaton. "He ought to

train on with care and a little attention. It would be a pity if Clark got his claws into him as well as the rest. If we're to put this thing through we shall want as many sound men on our side as possible."

The rest of the term passed uneventfully. Prizes and the Christmas concert gave Dipcote something else to think about besides the lack of football and the baiting of authority. Even the house-supper, a genial re-union that stimulated high spirits and steam-generation, was celebrated without untoward events. Watt proposed the health of Chatham's in a speech that recalled his earlier and gayer manner: he seemed for the time, at least, to have shaken off depression and injured pride. It might have been a return to sportsmanship (Beaton hoped it was) or it might have been due to the absence of his rival. Or it might just have been natural joy at the end of term and its attendant carelessness. Chatham replied to the toast in a pedagogic vein, congratulating his charges on "the excellent spirit and tone" that undoubtedly prevailed in his best of all possible houses. Everybody thought it boring, though everybody had known what to expect: but everybody, especially the Society of Raggers, cheered the time-worn sentiments to the echo. They cheered Chatham. They cheered Watt, Beaton, Clark (the cheers given for Clark were the heartiest of the festival), Wharton — even Shawlands, who blushed down to his boots at the unusual

thrill of a seeming popularity. They cheered the Mut, the Jades, the Studies, the Lower Study; and then individuals cheered each other without the least provocation. Even the perspiring boot-boy, cleaned and garnished with a linen collar, was cheered as he staggered about with incredible burdens of plates and knives and forks. 'Enry was finally called upon (by Pettigrew, entirely without warrant) for a speech. The boot-boy did not blush: long years at Dipcote had cured any innate propensity to shyness. He gave them a speech consisting of four words that lacked neither sincerity nor heartiness. "Chuck it, ole sports!" was the boot-boy's contribution, not the least successful of all the orations of the evening. When, finally, peace reigned and the house had gone to bed, a casual observer might have been excused for thinking that all was well with Dipcote generally and Mr. Chatham's house in particular. But Beaton knew the worth of house-supper cheers. "The flowing bowl!" he muttered, wagging his head as he turned out his study gas. "The flowing bowl! How many of these bright young sparks would turn on me and rend me if I caught 'em out of bounds? Every one, old son! every blooming one! Well . . . well. . . . Let's hope next term will be better than I expect. 'Cos I don't like the prospect. . . . I do not like it. . . . At least there's the holidays in between."

CHAPTER XV

The Easter term brought no comfort to the holders of the fort. Colquhoun's knee was still not sound, and the date of his return unsettled. This was not altogether unexpected, but his loss was none the less deplorable. A worse blow—rather, an additional blow fell: Mr. Baxendale had celebrated a speedy convalescence from "scarlet" by succumbing to a bad attack of "flu," and it was rumoured that he might not be back before the summer term. To fill his gap Mr. Chatham had appointed a temporary housemaster, one Cope, whose chief recommendation, it was asserted, was that he was a grandson of Chatham's. This was a lie. He happened to have published a pamphlet dealing with Greek Particles. Chatham had had occasion to correspond with him on the absorbing subject. A meeting and a lunch had taken place some six months ago, during which Mr. Cope had announced that he did a good deal of coaching: if Mr. Chatham at any time could put pupils in his way . . .? Chatham gladly promised. At Christmas he bethought him of Cope, wrote to see if he

would care for a few weeks' temporary work, and rejoiced to find that Cope was thinking of abandoning coaching and going in for a regular billet. Cope agreed to fill in the time as junior housemaster. *Voilà tout!*

On second thoughts, no . . . not quite all. . . . Mr. Cope was twenty-five years of age, but looked about eighteen. He had anæmic hair, a pink-and-white skin, a diffident temperament, and the baptismal name of Percy.

"And doesn't he look it?" said Merrifield rapturously to his stable-companion, Cole. "His godfathers and godmothers couldn't have 'thenned' for him a better handle than that. 'Percy!' It's simply perfect . . . he has it stamped on every yard."

"I don't suppose he'll give us much trouble," said Cole, with a ruminating smile. "I hear that in form he's simply chronic. The chaps talk out quite loud half the time—that is, when they're not busy eating or biffing the man in front."

"Chatham must be a blind sort of ass to bring such a chap in here," put in Lutworth. They were stealing the Lower Study's monopoly of a fire and effectively screening it from envious fags. "Hi, you kids! What was it like in prep last night with Percy?"

"Topping," said Bensham, a Third Former, trying to insinuate himself into a warmer nook. "The

whole study went up one after another—only a few minutes between each—to ask him to help us."

"Did he help?"

"Rather! Sweated like a good 'un at Vergil, and Cæsar, and Stinks, and Maths, and goodness knows what. He looked a bit limp at the end of it, though——"

"Yes, and what d'you think he did?" broke in Jackson, another Third Former. "At the end of the hour he made a sort of speech of thanks. Said he was very pleased to be at Dipcote and especially in Chatham's. Said he was delighted we had all made such a good start. Said——"

"Golly! this man is simply asking for it," said Merrifield. "It's our business to see that he isn't disappointed. Who could have hoped for such luck as this? I'm dashed sorry for good old Bax; but . . . oh! I hope, I *hope* he won't come back too soon and spoil it all. Percy the Peerless positively must be educated."

There was no delay in putting this charitable policy into execution. It was the end of the first week of term, and Percy's movements and habits were beginning to be known. Between 9.30 and 10.30 domiciliary visits to the dormitories might be, and often were, made by Chatham or Bax, or by both. Percy upheld the custom. But at 10.30 his conscience (he had a worrying conscience and

many good intentions) allowed him to retire to his sitting-room and settle down to his books, a glass of spring water, and a light collation of some weird patent cereal food looking like bran that was ashamed of itself. These delights, together with two cigarettes (he was a methodical man), gave Percy the illusion of riotous happiness. At 11.30 his habit was to stand erect at the open window, practise deep breathing in the interests of his chest measurement for five minutes, turn out the lights, and go to bed. This was known to Merrifield both from personal observation through the keyhole and the giggling comments of friendly "jades" who served the refection. Accordingly, at eleven o'clock, when all the house was still and darkness reigned, Merrifield (who shared the smallest dormitory with Clark and Cole) stole out on what he was pleased to call "an errand of mercy." It involved the wearing of gym shoes and the carrying of a sack which had seen better days.

The benefactor of humanity tiptoed along the corridor till he came to a small door. This was locked: but as Merrifield had abstracted the key from the matron's room earlier in the day, no difficulties presented themselves. He opened the door, stepped in quietly, closed the door behind him and locked it, and then switched on a small electric torch that had been a Christmas present. On one side the roof sloped sharply: bare rafters

were about him: underneath was a narrow footway of planks to give safe passage across the joists and plaster that made the ceilings of rooms below. Cobwebs hung from every vantage-point. With a satisfied chuckle Merrifield walked quietly along the footway, flashing his light here and there to guide him. Presently he paused. Before him was an upturned orange-box; above him a trapdoor. The prowler mounted on the box, unbolted the trapdoor, climbed up easily, and in another moment found himself upon the leads. There was no danger of falling, for a four-foot parapet ran all round the house, and between this and the base of the roof-pitch was a kind of promenade about a foot wide. Merrifield looked round him, much as Balboa gazed on the Pacific from the Darien peak "with wild surmise." In the distance were the lights of Dipcote city: nearer at hand, the massed buildings of the school and other houses. As he gazed, the chimes of the abbey struck the quarter, and he knew there was no time to lose. Shivering a little, in the night air, although he had had the forethought to don an overcoat, Merrifield walked on for a few yards, turned a corner, and then halted at the base of a chimney stack of whose geographical situation he had made a careful and extensive survey during the past week. Fortunately, this particular stack was low. Merrifield flashed his light on each chimney-pot in turn, and presently observed a

chalked X on one. "Ah!" sighed Merrifield in pure delight. "And now to work!"

Quietly he folded the sack he carried into four thick folds. Quietly he placed it upon the top of the chimney, from which but a moment ago smoke had been freely pouring. Patiently he held it in position for ten minutes, good. Then, with a muttered "That *ought* to do the trick!" he removed the sack and dropped it on the ground. Next he retraced his steps, climbed back through the trapdoor, carefully bolting it after him, returned safe and unobserved by the way he came, and presently emerged into a corridor that sounded like a meeting of the more warlike Suffragettes. . . .

Let us, too, retrace our steps, for it would be a pity not to appreciate Merrifield's self-sacrifice to the uttermost. At 11.15 Mr. Cope drained his tumbler with temperate and hygienic satisfaction. He then stood up and stretched himself, preparatory to breathing practice. Then . . . "Whew-w-w!" said Mr. Cope. "That chimney has started to smoke. . . . I didn't know it ever smoked. . . . I . . ." A blast of mephitic fumes drove out into the room and almost choked him. "Phew-w-w!" said Percy, with a cough: "this is really almost intolerable. I must . . ." As if by magic the smoke increased in geometrical progression. Great clouds of noxious vapour blew in upon him. Smuts fluttered tangibly on everything in sight. "Can

the chimney be on fire?" thought Mr. Cope. Panic-stricken, his facile conscience remembered the cigarettes. Could he have dropped a burning end upon the carpet? In fancy he saw himself the murderer of forty innocent boys, self-branded with remorse for life. What should he do? Open the window, of course! and he flew to let in air. By great luck he remembered in the nick of time that this was the worst possible course in case of fire: the draught would fan the flames. And all the time black blankets of smoke poured in upon him. Water, then! for heaven's sake water, and at once! Coughing, spluttering, sneezing, in agony, the unhappy Percy dashed to the door. He flung it open, and paused in a paroxysm of coughing to wipe his smarting eyes. The ever-increasing and accursed smoke bellied out into the corridor, causing wakeful "jades" to sniff and tremble and sit up in bed with frenzied questions. Fear travelled as fast as the smoke itself. In five minutes the house was buzzing, alert, anxious to help in any and every way. The dormitories emptied themselves with pleasing thrills, not unmixed with shouts.

"Is it a fire?" asked Beaton, shouldering his way through a crowd of eager fags. "What a beastly smell——"

"Looks like Bax's room," said Watt, thrusting his other arm into a dressing-gown half put on. 'Hello! Mrs. Salkeld!" (The Mut was out in a

marvellously decorous toilette, palpitating but calm), "what's the row?"

"Go to your rooms and dress, boys!" said the voice of Mr. Chatham. To his eternal credit, Greek Particles at that moment had no cares for him, albeit he had only just torn himself from their meditation in his study. He had the advantage of being fully dressed, and this helped to add to the moral force he tried unfailingly to assert. But even thus advantaged he spoke in vain. Who on earth wanted to dress when thrills were on? Beaton dashed into the nearest dorm and collared a water-jug, his example being widely imitated. Following their noses, in the literal sense, the eager throng made their way to Bax's room, where Percy was still leaning against the wall, coughing violently. Beaton headed the gallant rush. Before a soul could say them nay, half-a-dozen gallons of water were splashed bountifully at the smoke. And then (it was just after Merrifield removed the sack) the fire again began to draw. Gradually the smoke cleared off, and the house took stock of the situation. It was a bestial scene of smuts, dirt, an ozoneless atmosphere, and a dripping carpet.

"Go to your rooms, boys! There is no danger now, I assure you——"

"But, sir! can't we help? Can't we do something?"

"No! No! There is nothing more——"

"Sir! Sir! Here's some more water, sir! Where shall we put it? Hi! room for the water——"

By frantic and almost tearful efforts the zeal of the water-carriers was restrained. After much good and unappreciated work had been put in by Mr. Chatham, the matron, Watt, and Beaton, the junior members of the house were forced into their respective dorms. The seniors hung about a while, discussing theories, and then they too dispersed. Mr. Cope was left explaining to Mr. Chatham that he could not explain—that he had no idea—that it was impossible to account for—a *lusus naturæ* —a wholly unprecedented situation—he would willingly, cheerfully, give five pounds to be able to explain. . . . Mr. Chatham received his explanations rather coldly. It seemed such an extraordinary thing . . . was he quite *sure* that . . .? Mr. Cope was *quite sure;* nay! he was positive—absolutely positive—though of what it would be hard to say, as he seemed anything but clear upon the point himself. He went to bed in a sort of stupor, induced partly by an overdose of smoke, partly by the enforced confusion of his mental process.

After Chatham had retired Beaton heard trampling in the corridor, bursts of smothered giggling, and a whispered chant. Grumbling to himself, he opened his dorm door just in time to catch the

offenders. It was a new idea that had recently sprung into existence. Some genius had seen a pantomime in the holidays in which certain low comedians had employed a spectacular device that became known at Dipcote later as a fish train—why, goodness only knows. It was made up thus: three or four—or a dozen or more—boys stood close up to each other in line, each man clasping the one in front round the body. Then they walked about, marching in step. It sounds silly, but the effect of a number of thinking bipeds so engaged was ludicrous in the extreme, and for a time the fish train became immensely popular, though custom staled its finite variety. At present the idea was novel and pleasing to most. But Beaton was not at all pleased. The present train was headed by Clark, followed by Merrifield (cleansed), Cole, Lutworth, and three or four more of the bigger juniors. All were in pyjamas or nightgowns, and they were chanting in whispers, in time with the step, "Percy has been smoked out—SMOKED out—SMOKED OUT! Percy has been SMOKED out—ha! ha! ha!" They had perambulated the corridors and visited each dormitory amid scenes of great enthusiasm, but they looked slightly abashed before Beaton's eye.

"What the blazes is all this?" he growled.

Clark answered with considerable *sang froid* and a jaunty smile.

"Just celebrating the Fifth of November, Beaton. We couldn't let such an occasion pass without comment. It does look nobby, doesn't it?"

"Looks like a pack of lunatics," said Beaton. "We've had enough rows to-night. Get off to bed at once. You're big enough not to play the fool at this time."

"All right, keep your hair on," said Clark, as the fish train disengaged. "We'll go to bed like good little boys. Nightie-night."

Beaton made no answer as he watched them disperse. He had half a mind to give each of them a few hundred lines to teach them better manners. But the smoke had certainly upset the usual order of things, and (perhaps wisely) he thought it better to rest content with a mere dispersal. But he went back to bed in a vile temper, wishing more than ever that Bax had not crocked. Percy was a poor substitute for Bax. . . . It was evident that little reliance could be placed on him to help hold the fort.

CHAPTER XVI

There was a few days' interval in which the general report, had one been issued, would have read "Nothing doing." The more riotous elements of Chatham's rested on their oars, digesting the humour of the smoke *coup*, but probably laying plans for further operations. Beaton and Shawlands were thankful for the brief respite, but they were too wise to expect the calm to remain unbroken for any lengthy period. Mr. Chatham retired to his happy seclusion, content to bury the smoke in oblivion, as no explanation seemed forthcoming, relying on Percy and his band of monitors. But though for the moment there was no overt act of rebellion there were many signs of unrest. The junior members of the House began to shirk footer in increased numbers, preferring secret "frowsts" on wet days, comforting themselves with cocoa and grub-boxes. Many suffered at the hands of Beaton, but more escaped detection. Watt made no effort to hound them out, contenting himself with the doings of the School fifteen. Clark and Wharton followed his lead and laughed at the juniors' tales of broken rules. When a fag is allowed to boast of

breaking bounds or pulling a " beak's " leg in school before a monitor or a member of the First fifteen things are in a pretty bad way. It says little for the house, and less for the senior who listens. Neither Clark nor Wharton was above earning cheap popularity by this means. At present Watt had not stooped to their level, but still he made no effort to take a decent line.

Beaton was now a regular member of the First, having attained to the dignity of fifth forward in the pack. His early rising continued, much to the disgust of Goss, who had daily to crawl out and wake him. Every day Beaton went for a run before breakfast—a short pipe-opener—and every afternoon he did hard training in the playground or across country. He had even kept it up during the Christmas holidays. By this time he was a more than useful member of the scrum. He was on speaking, but not friendly, terms with Watt. But the footer captain, even if he had wished for a petty revenge, knew that now he was too good to drop from the team. In addition to this, the Sixth Form master noticed a marked improvement in Beaton's proses and construing. Knowing that one swallow does not make a summer, he checked too fervent hopes. The effort (like many another effort) might die down; but at present there seemed no doubt that Beaton was working, and he hoped for the best.

Shawlands "carried on" much on the usual lines. His "preps" had not been stormy since the Lorimer incident—the Lower Study had discovered that he had backbone. But the atmosphere when he took prep or helped to shepherd "runs" was anything but cordial: the wheels of the machine seemed to call for grease, yet how could he apply it? What more could he do? He found great comfort in Beaton and (in a less degree) Price, who now came into his study practically every night to work. Price and his official study chums were cooling in their relations. There was no quarrel, no obvious break as yet. But Merrifield and Co. regularly used cribs. Price had long since renounced the kindly aid of Bohn. His friends had regarded his conversion with amused tolerance. But one cannot work comfortably in the same study at the same lesson in two camps—one of which translates aloud or does each other's maths in union, while the other works in silence and alone. And Clark or Wharton came in frequently—too frequently for Price's taste. He was fathoming the worth of such. Price said little: he was not the kind of man who chants defiance or imputes motives, rubbing his hands over his own virtue the while. If occasion should demand, it was not unlikely that Price would show himself in a more distinctive and aggressive light. For the present, he merely withdrew quietly to Shawlands' study and

did his job, the humble but useful job of running straight, without advertisement or whining.

The next indication of approaching storm was not long in coming. One night, according to his usual custom, Shawlands sat up working late. He went upstairs about eleven o'clock and entered his dormitory without noticing anything unusual. Late workers were allowed to light the gas for ten minutes when they finally retired. Shawlands struck a match, lit the gas, and then looked about him in considerable astonishment. There were six beds in his dorm—his own and those of five of Chatham's smallest fags. At eleven o'clock these five should have been safely tucked up and asleep. Instead of this, Messrs. Brown, Paget, Jenkins, Copperthwaite and Hinkle, clad in dressing-gowns, were sitting up on their respective beds in silence. To be strictly accurate, they were sitting on the bare mattresses. Every shred of bedclothes, every sheet, blanket, quilt and pillow was piled up in a vast heap in the middle of the room.

"What on earth's all this?" asked Shawlands, in justifiable amazement. He had heard of rags, but never of a dormitory ragging itself and then waiting for the house monitor to inspect the ruins.

"We've been ragged," said Jenkins, in an awed voice. "That's all."

"Who ragged you?" asked Shawlands, the words springing instinctively to his lips.

"They said they'd murder us if we sneaked," said Brown resignedly. He spoke as one who has been present at a cataclysm of nature, to whom the world has no more terrors.

Shawlands stood thinking. The Dipcote code was against tale-bearing, and he could not force reluctant and frightened kids to tell him what he wanted to know without infringing the code. He could, of course, report the affair to Chatham, but that only meant transferring the responsibility: Chatham would force the kids to tell. If only he had caught them in the act . . .

"Well," he said at last, leaning against the mantelpiece, "I'm not going to make you sneak: 'twouldn't be sporting. But I wish you'd tell me what happened: you needn't give any names."

The fags brightened up considerably. Until this speech of Shawlands' they had feared that they were between the devil and the deep sea—the wrath of Shawlands and the raggers. Either way, they seemed certain of a lamming, and the prospect had depressed them with its palpable injustice. Now, a way out had been provided by the sportsman Shawlands. More: they had a tale to tell—a tale to move the hearts of men. Paget licked his lips and began hastily, lest one of his fellows should forestall him.

"It was this way," he began. "I put the light out at a quarter to ten. Chatham poked his nose

in a few minutes later and said, 'All right? G'night, my boys!'—*you* know the style. Percy looked in later, about ten——"

"It was after ten," interrupted Hinkle. "Fully a minute. I heard the abbey——"

"All right—after ten," said Paget, cutting in remorselessly. "Percy made a few rotten jokes and went out. Then we yarned a bit——"

"About five minutes——"

"Who's telling this? About five minutes, Shawlands, and then went to sleep. Suddenly——"

"I wasn't asleep," interrupted Copperthwaite. "I'd only half dozed——"

"You liar!" snorted Paget, indignant at this apparent effort to steal a march. "We were *all* fast asleep, Shawlands. Suddenly there was a sort of row, and I felt somebody hauling me out——"

"By the toes," corroborated Brown. "Me, too."

"I bumped on the floor most beastly hard," continued Paget, "and then"—a name was on the tip of his tongue, but he checked it in time—"then one of them said, 'Strike a light.' They lit the gas, and every man jack of us was on the boards. Then they simply swiped every stitch, piled it up like this, and——"

"—and said if we touched it before the morning they'd flay us and hang out our skins to dry," gasped Hinkle, determined to have some share in the epic.

"So after they'd dowsed the glim we just sat here in the dark."

"H'm!" said Shawlands meditatively; "you'd better make your beds, sharp."

"But they said——" began Brown timidly. Evidently the lessons of frightfulness had bitten deep.

"Never you mind what they said," observed Shawlands. "You get the room straight. At least they've let my bed alone, and that's something to be thankful for."

Urged by his words and the chilly atmosphere, the five shivering mortals set to work. In a very few minutes the heap of bedding was resolved into its component parts and the beds were "made," or at least flung together sufficiently to sleep in.

Shawlands undressed rapidly, turned out the gas, and got into bed. More strictly, he got through it. There was a heavy bump as he disappeared. The cross-pieces had been removed.

"Oh, my sacred aunt!" groaned Shawlands disgustedly. "This is about the limit."

He crawled out of the ruins, lit the gas once more, and gazed sternly at the five fags sitting up in curious astonishment.

"Why didn't one of you kids warn me of this?" he asked. "I've a jolly good mind——"

"We didn't know!" gasped Jenkins.

"What!" said Shawlands incredulously. "Do you mean to tell me——?"

"I swear we didn't know, Shawlands!" struck in Brown, with obvious sincerity. "Did we, you chaps?"

The chaps denied the soft impeachment with fervour. They were decent enough kids, Shawlands knew; it was impossible to believe they were lying.

"Honestly, Shawlands," corroborated Paget, "those chaps didn't lay a finger on your bed while we were here. They must have oiled in some time earlier in the evening or the afternoon."

"Oh, well," growled the unlucky house monitor, beginning to disinter his bedding; "it can't be helped. Just roll over and go to sleep."

"Can't we help?" suggested Paget, putting one leg out.

"No, thanks. I shan't be so very long. Just go to sleep."

He found the iron cross-pieces on the floor beneath the mattress. After some patient effort and a few skinned fingers Shawlands managed to fit his bed together again successfully. He soon had the mattress in place, and at last found himself between the sheets. For a little while he lay thinking things over, wondering who the guilty parties might be. Suspicion might be directed equally well against half-a-dozen or more, but where was

the proof? Lorimer was the first name that occurred, as was only natural; reflection told him that just as likely Lorimer was guiltless—probably, in fact, would fight shy of another imbroglio with him for a time. Anyhow, what could be done? Had he caught them red-handed, he would have . . . The Swot gritted his teeth and clenched his fists beneath the blankets, knowing that in his present mood he could have faced the whole of the First fifteen without flinching. Should he report the whole thing? Of course, he would tell Beaton, but that could hardly lead to anything without knowledge of the assailants. Chatham, then, or Percy? Even the Swot grinned in the darkness as he thought of the hapless and hopeless Percy. Chatham? He hated to appeal to a beak unless circumstances forced him to that last resort. No: he would not report to Chatham. For the present he would wait patiently, biding his time until he had something definite to go on—some open act of revolt, wherein he could catch the criminal and proceed to a summary dealing with him. Shawlands clenched his fists again, and vowed that, come what might, he would not be beaten. Supposing even Watt himself were involved (and Shawlands thought he *might* have descended to this, though he "tipped" Lorimer for first place), the Swot vowed to see it through. With which comforting reflection he turned over and was soon asleep. . . .

But the adventures of the night were not yet over. An hour later the door of the dormitory was opened with exceeding softness. As the intruder had taken pains to oil both lock and hinges that afternoon it was not wonderful that no squeak was heard. The door opened little by little, and presently a head was pushed cautiously round, listening. There was no moonlight coming through the windows, but the visitor knew his *local*. Quietly he crept along the strip of matting that formed an alley-way till he reached the house monitor's bed at the far end of the room. He stood by the bedside a moment. Then with an adroit movement he tried to give Shawlands a soap pill, recking not of the chance of choking a sleeping victim. But the first touch woke Shawlands, who slept lightly. Half asleep and bewildered, he struck out and clutched blindly. The chance blow got home in the wind. "*Ouch!*" grunted the victim and doubled up. The hurt was only momentary, however, and by the time Shawlands was really awake and had sprung out the marauder was in flight. He stumbled over a bed in the dark and came to the ground, the monitor falling over him. They grappled and rolled. Then the intruder broke away and fled. He reached the door a yard in front of Shawlands, slamming the door behind him. Shawlands tugged the handle in vain. "Light the gas!" he cried to the awakened fags.

"This chap's holding the handle! We may bag him yet! Quick!" Somebody found the matches and struck a light. Shawlands, still pulling at the door knob, gave a cry of triumph. The door was fast, but a white patch showed between the jambs. "Hurrah!" exulted Shawlands, with leaping pulses: "*he's shut his own nightshirt in the door!*"

CHAPTER XVII

The nocturnal brigand, when he slammed the dormitory door in Shawlands' face, had meant only to delay pursuit until he had earthed in his own room. The fluttering tail of his nightshirt had upset his calculations, and he was compelled to hang on to the door to prevent Shawlands discovering who he was. Shawlands' first impulse was to pull the door open, but the man on the other side was stronger, and he tugged in vain. When the light disclosed the true position Shawlands' object was reversed: he now pushed *against* the door to prevent it being opened and the brigand getting free. "Come and shove, you chaps!" he said breathlessly. "If we're careful we'll bag him yet!"

Paget and his fellows eagerly obeyed, and for a minute or two they waited in silence, Shawlands, anxious to get his breath once more after the struggle, pondering schemes of capture.

"Look here!" he said presently. "I'll tell you what to do. Brown and Hinkle! Get hold of that nightshirt and hang on for all you're worth. When I say 'Now!' Paget, Jenkins, Copperthwaite

and I will stop shoving. I'll fling open the door and pounce. He won't be able to run far if you grip that tail tight. Are you ready?"

"Right ho!" muttered Brown and Hinkle, setting their teeth and achieving a firm hold.

"*Now!*" said Shawlands, flinging open the door and making a frantic grab. Messrs. Hinkle and Brown instantaneously measured their length on the floor. In their hands fluttered about a yard of white linen with a ragged edge. Shawlands, Paget, Jenkins, and Copperthwaite fell over each other in various attitudes of extreme discomfort. The passage was empty: not a footstep was to be heard. The night-bird had been smarter than their expectations. On finding his struggles futile he had changed his plans. He had ruthlessly sacrificed a nightshirt in the interests of his skin by tearing himself forcibly away. The jammed door had held the torn portion fast until the door opened. Gravity did the rest.

"That's rather a sell," mourned Paget, picking himself up. "We can't bag him now unless his name's marked."

They examined the fragment of linen, but no name was visible. If the shirt was marked, it was evidently on the part that had escaped.

"Search the dorms for a chap with a torn nightie?" suggested Copperthwaite, his detective instincts aroused.

Shawlands shook his head.

"He'll have got another out of his box by this time and changed. A chap's who smart enough to think of this won't be sleeping in a ruined shirt now. We might as well go back to bed."

The night passed without further incident. Beaton's genial face next day grew long over Shawlands' recital. He could give small comfort. "Of course," he said, drumming his fingers on the study table, "one could report to Chatham. If we suggested it (he'd never think of it himself) he might have all the boxes searched. The man who was a nightshirt short would be twug, but . . . I rather hate going to Chatham, don't you?"

Shawlands nodded.

"Yes. If it were Bax, now, one could talk it over without officially reporting. He could tell us if we need bring in Chat or not. As it is, I'd rather put things through on our own, if possible."

"Same here," agreed Beaton. "Heigho! I wish scarlet fever and flu and crocked knees wouldn't pick out the decent men first. If it were Clark, now . . . Well, failing reporting it, I don't see that we can make any move. We've just got to keep a sharp look-out, *ut supra*, *status quo ante*, or any other comforting tag that may occur to your scholarly mind. Personally, I am too fed to look up Bartlett's 'Familiar Quotations' for the appropriate comment. . . . Is that the bell for school? Dear

me . . . dear me . . . life gets more difficult every hour."

Others besides Beaton were finding existence a serious problem. At 12.10 that day Goss went to the Arcade, a pillared vestibule between Big School and the School House, to see if his name appeared in the Dipcote Fourth fifteen. To his disappointment he found that he had been "booted" in favour of a wholly undeserving parasite named Yarborough. As he turned away disconsolately from the notice-boards he saw Caterham emerge from the School House passage. "Hello, kid!" said Goss. (He was two months younger than Goss, and technically of the same standing in Dipcote history. But moral force excused the assumption of seniority.) "Hello, kid! Been up for a lamming?"

He spoke in jest, not at first noticing that Caterham was in an even more nervous state than usual. Ever since September Goss's *protégé* had been moderately conspicuous for a general air of fright and downtroddenness. He had no chums, and, indeed, seemed to avoid the exuberant comradeship of Chatham's Lower Study. Under ordinary circumstances Goss would not have bothered about a new kid's shyness, but Colquhoun's request had spurred him to an effort. He had really tried to be friendly and helpful, and it was pure decency that had made him persuade the Society of Raggers

to admit Caterham. The experiment seemed to have been a failure, Caterham apparently being bent on understudying the part of Skeleton at the Feast. However, the Raggers had been very sporting: they forbore to reproach Goss unduly, and tried to make Caterham feel at home at their meetings by giving him every odd and distasteful job that happened to crop up.

Caterham glanced nervously at Goss as he approached. "Lamming?" he said. "No! Oh no! But . . . I've been hauled by the Old Man."

"What for?" asked Goss, with surprised interest. He had not imagined such a poor-spirited creature capable of any offence.

"I was spotted out of bounds yesterday by one of the beaks, and he reported me. I didn't know anything about it until I was sent for. The Old Man has gated me for the rest of the term."

"Well, that's nothing," said Goss comfortably. "You won't be able to go down town again, which is a nuisance. But you were lucky to get off without a lamming."

Caterham seemed anything but happy, in spite of Goss's assurance. "You don't know," he said, jerking his head nervously over his shoulder. "You don't twig at all. . . . I had to meet Clark here at the quarter. . . . Oh, I hope he won't mind! I hope he won't mind!"

"*Mind?* Why should Clark mind?" asked Goss, in astonishment.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when Clark came briskly through the arches. He walked up without hesitation, pulled a letter out of his pocket, and offered it to Caterham. "Here it is, young 'un!" he said. "Now, cut off and don't waste time."

"Oh, please, Clark! I can't!" said Caterham.

Clark looked at him with a mixture of surprise and anger.

"Can't!" he repeated. "What d'you mean?"

"I've just been gated," said Caterham rapidly. "For breaking bounds. I was twug yesterday."

Clark's face changed. For a moment he looked almost frightened. "Twug?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me? By whom?"

"I don't know. Some beak. I was seen near the Fleshergate and reported."

Clark's face cleared. He seemed relieved.

"You delivered the letter all right?" he asked. "I mean, you weren't seen in Whitehead's?"

"No. It must have been after. I didn't know I'd been twug till just now. Oh, please don't be angry."

His voice trailed off in pitiable appeal.

Goss was disgusted, being unable to make allowances for a nervous nature. At any rate *he* wouldn't be such a funk if . . .

Clark waited a moment, thinking. Then he turned to Goss and spoke quite pleasantly.

"Look here, kid!" he said, in a friendly fashion; "this letter is most important. I can't take it myself—I'm awfully busy—got to see Lethbridge about some work. Have you got pluck enough to speed into the Fleshergate and leave the letter for me? There's practically no risk at all if you're nippy."

On a previous occasion Pettigrew had been flattered by the appeal to his pluck and had willingly gone. Goss was not flattered. He had never forgotten his first encounter with Clark, when the girdle-cakes had been upset, and Clark's instant readiness to lam him without any decent excuse. Since then Clark had never been overtly brutal to any one in the Lower Study: Colquhoun's hint and his own thirst for popularity had made him play the *rôle*—the undignified *rôle*—of hearty companion to any kid. His attitude had achieved his purpose hitherto. He had become a very popular figure in Chatham's. But first impressions often leave an indelible mark. Goss had begun with instant dislike, a feeling of rebellion against injustice. This had cooled a little through lapse of time, but he had shown strength of character in not following the Lower Study lead: he did not like Clark. Also, he began to suspect him. Caterham's attitude hinted at unpleasant secrets: did he bully the kid in private, that he seemed in

such a funk? Besides . . . why didn't he take this letter out of bounds himself? Goss remembered Pettigrew's adventure: this was not the first letter to be delivered. Was Clark trying to get chaps to do something he was afraid to do himself?

"Sorry," said Goss briefly; "but I can't."

"Why not?" asked Clark, scowling at the unexpected check.

Goss might have replied truthfully, "Because you've no right to fag me." (Clark was a house monitor now, having been appointed at the beginning of term by Chatham, but this, of course, only gave him the right of house-fagging. He had also been given his footer colours.) Instead, he answered with equal truth and greater tact, "Well . . . it's out of bounds, you see."

Caterham shifted timorously from foot to foot, Goss looming heroically in his eyes. It was David and Goliath up-to-date.

Clark reverted to persuasion.

"I know it's out of bounds—a few yards," he said. "But you see how it is: I can't go myself; Caterham has been gated, and it's as much as his life is worth to be seen anywhere in Dipcote, let alone the Fleshergate. This letter simply *must* be delivered before one o'clock—it's frightfully important—it may mean a lot to me——"

"Sorry," said Goss sturdily; "but I'm afraid I can't!"

Clark changed his tone. "You mean you won't?" he said, coming nearer.

Goss did not flinch—he had good stuff in him—but he felt far from easy. "I can't," he said doggedly, but looking the bigger boy squarely in the eyes.

And then Clark, the usually careless, easy-going, friendly Clark, lost his temper. He raised his hand and gave Goss a smart slap on the cheek. "You little swab!" he said threateningly; "if you——"

"Clark! Just a moment, please!" said a quiet voice in the rear.

The three boys turned, two with intense relief, one with some alarm. The *deus ex machina* had appeared, prompt to time, in the person of the Old Man—the head master of Dipcote School. He was going through the Arcade, taking a short cut on his way to Campbell's.

Caterham and Goss, seeing that they were not wanted, melted away.

"I say!" said Goss, with unction, as soon as they were alone; "what luck! If the Old Man hadn't turned up, I believe he'd have murdered me!"

"Won't he lam you later?" queried Caterham. The same thought had occurred to Goss, but he refused to meet trouble half-way.

"He may, but . . . I dunno. Thank goodness I'm not in his dorm, or I should be in the cart.

Anyhow, a lamming is only a lamming; they can't kill you."

"I wish I'd your guts," said Caterham wistfully. (I apologise for this word, so harsh and intriguing; but Dipcote used it, and this is a Dipcote yarn.) "When Clark sets about me I can hardly stand it."

"Why, does he biff you regularly?" asked Goss, in surprise.

"Not so much as he did at first. He used to take me up to the carpenter's shop and simply whale me. But we were nearly copped one day by somebody—Clark made me drop out of the window, and we only just got away. Since then he's only booted me now and then—never really lammed me. I say! Promise you won't give it away!"

"Righto!" said Goss, ruminating. "Jove! he must be a swipe! I say! Has Clark ever sent you out of bounds before?"

"Oh, heaps of times!" said Caterham. "If you hadn't heard all this, of course I'd never have told you. But I suppose it doesn't matter now. . . . I say, you won't split?"

"Of course not," answered Goss. "I'm not that sort. Well, I should say it's a good thing you've been copped and only gated. It'll save you from being sent out by Clark again. . . . I wonder if the Old Man will sack the brute?"

Discussing this pleasing possibility they went

across to the House, followed in due course by Clark, in a very bad temper. Of course, there had been no hint of sacking, or even of punishment. The Old Man had merely said, "What was the trouble, Clark?" as they walked through the Arcade.

The offender adopted a mildly repentant, careless attitude.

"A youngster trying to be funny, sir," he said, with an apologetic smile. "I dare say he didn't mean it for cheek, but I lost my temper and let out. It was a stupid thing to do."

"H'm!" said the Head. "You're not supposed to use your hands (*or* feet) on any fellow. I understand you're a house monitor now, and so have the right to cane for House offences. But don't use your hands under any circumstances. You understand?"

"Yes, sir. Of course, another time I should take care to keep my temper, but——"

"Er—quite so," interrupted the Old Man, with a glance that Clark found rather trying. "By the by, I think there is no need to pursue this any farther. You follow me?"

"I beg pardon, sir?" said Clark, rather blankly.

"I mean," said the Old Man, with emphatic clearness, "that there must be no—er—further examination of Goss on your part. Just remember that, please."

He left Clark scowling at his retreating back. "The swine!" was his elegant comment. "'No further examination!' Oh, you funny ass! you funny ass! All right . . . there shall be 'no further examination,' for the present, anyhow. I dare say I can wait. . . . And now, what about this bally letter? If it doesn't go, I'm done."

Glancing at his watch he saw that he had just time to get down town and return. Forgetful of the alleged engagement with Lethbridge, he adventured himself to the Fleshergate and in due course returned safely. On the threshold of Chatham's he met Merrifield, beaming.

"Heard the news?" said Merrifield. "Colquhoun's back. Came by the 12.27. He looks awfully fit, but——"

"Oh, go to Jericho!" returned Clark rudely. "I'm fed up."

CHAPTER XVIII

"I feel," observed Beaton, extracting a sardine by the tail from its congested dwelling, "like the historic gentleman who told his valet to put three dozen of sherry by his bedside, and call him the day after to-morrow."

It was about ten days after Colquhoun's return. The time was 10.30, the *dramatis personæ* the Dipcote captain, his study chum and Shawlands. They were enjoying a light supper and a yarn, picking up the thread that had been interrupted for a full two months.

"You old ass!" said Colquhoun, smiling. "From what I hear you've no right to talk like that. Beaton the Frowster has given place to Beaton of the First Fifteen and the strenuous life."

"Yes, and, by Jove! it *is* strenuous," asserted Beaton. "Not that I mean I'd like to backslide, to revert to the path of error and all that. Only it's such a relief to have you here to run things that I should like to go to bed, partly for the rest-after-battle idea, partly for pure joy at your return."

"I suppose it has been rather a rusty job,"

commented the captain, growing grave. "You don't seem to have had many backers."

"'Cept the honourable gentleman opposite," said Beaton, nodding at Shawlands.

The Swot grinned at the compliment.

"We've had some lively times," he said, pouring out more cocoa. "What with Percy——"

"He must be a beauty!" interrupted Colquhoun. "What a drop after Bax!"

"Rather! He's worse than useless. . . . And the other chaps . . . haven't been much help."

Colquhoun frowned thoughtfully and played with his spoon.

"I'd hoped things might have got straighter . . . hoped my absence might have helped Watt to lend a hand. From what I've heard and seen, he seems to be playing the goat pretty considerably. An awful pity. Beaton, old man, has there been any more poker?"

"Dashed if I know," said Beaton, scratching his head. "I told you of the Adventure of the Barred Door. I've had nothing of the kind since. Haven't seen a card or spotted anything suspicious. But it hardly seems natural for a new wheeze like that to die out so suddenly—'specially when it was so strictly forbidden."

"It isn't natural," agreed Colquhoun. "But I hope it's the case. . . . What's the House team going to be like?"

Beaton shook his head.

"Can't tell. Watt isn't bothering his head over the House, though I must say he sweats over the School fifteen. It *is* rough luck your knee won't be good till next season. What a team Chatham's might have had! You, Watt, and Clark in the three-quarter line! It would have been a record. Well, having both the school skipper and the footer skipper in the same house is pretty hot stuff."

"It might have been an A1 year," said Colquhoun grimly. "Instead of that, we're at sixes and sevens. . . . I'd looked forward to my last year at Dipcote before going up to Cambridge, but I can't say it's panned out as I'd hoped."

"Friend Robbie has a few well-chosen words about the best-laid schemes, hasn't he?" queried Beaton, yawning. "Shawlands, can't you offer up something pat from an English poet to cheer our noble captain?"

"'When the morning riseth red, Rise not thou, but keep thy bed,'" quoted Shawlands, getting up. "I'm dog-tired. Good-night."

"Me, too," said Beaton, following suit. "You might lend a man old enough to be your father an arm up the stairs. If any of these jokers try a dorm raid or a booby trap to-night I shan't offer resistance: I shall simply curl up and cry. Coming, Collie?"

They went up together, noticing as they passed

that the other studies were dark. Evidently nobody else was sitting up to work or "grill." At the head of the stairs they separated, and Colquhoun went straight to his room. He undressed thoughtfully, wondering how things were going to turn out, hoping little, fearful of much. By this time he had got over the disappointment of his crocked knee. The fact that he would never again play for Dipcote, never have the chance to regain his place in the School line, whatever prospects Cambridge might hold in store, did not occupy his musings unduly. The thing had happened, was bad luck, and must be accepted cheerfully according to the code. But he wanted very much to make a success of his skippering, and the House troubled him not a little. The feud gave no present promise of healing. When he and Watt had met in the passage on the day of his return, he had said, "Hello, Watt!" cheerfully, hoping that the olive branch would be accepted without comment or restraint. Watt had not even answered him. The cut direct needed no additional evidence to confirm his fears that all was not well with Chatham's.

Colquhoun climbed into bed, and then remembered that he had left his watch down in the study. It was a gold watch, a birthday present from his father, and he did not like to leave it lying there all night. Probably it would be all right, but there *might* come a thief. With a grunt of disgust the

captain got out of bed again and slipped on his dressing-gown. Lighting the dorm candle that was kept for emergencies, he made his way downstairs and successfully retrieved the watch. Then he went slowly upstairs again. When he reached the sixth step from the top he paused. His eyes were now level with the landing, and two other eyes met his in a surprised, half-timid stare. They belonged to a small white mouse, brought back after the Christmas holidays by Goss. Pets were allowed at Dipcote upon two conditions: (1) they must be of a reasonable size and species: dogs, cats, crocodiles, two-toed sloths, etc., were strictly barred; and (2) they must be kept outside the houses—that is, in hutches or the like. On no account must they inhabit desks or lockers. Obviously, Goss had transgressed; but it was a venial offence that could speedily be atoned for and corrected. Probably he had brought it upstairs in his pocket, or else it had escaped from his grub-box. Colquhoun smiled, remembering his own fagging days. He was a decent chap, and resolved to capture the mouse, to return it safely next day, and give the offender fifty lines.

The captain was wearing soft felt bedroom slippers. Quietly he crept up the stairs; gently he put out his hand to grasp the tiny creature; almost he had it, when—*pouf!* there was a scurry and the "half-wild, but wholly tame" quarry

scampered back a yard or two. Then it stopped, and Colquhoun almost imagined that it was grinning at him. "Dash it!" thought the captain, amusedly annoyed. "I shall have to go slow." Without making any noise he put down the candlestick and softly began to creep towards it. The mouse retreated, scurried off again, and again stopped, regarding the pursuer. Colquhoun paused to give it increased confidence. The mouse sat up and brushed its whiskers. Then it ran down the passage a few yards and stopped again. Colquhoun, noiseless as an Indian trailer, crept after it. . . . He held out his hand. . . . The mouse advanced, came closer, and a too-eager paw made a futile grab. Off down the passage went the mouse, and once more stopped. The whole business had to begin over again. Colquhoun crawled very slowly, very softly, down the passage, illuminated by the guttering candle behind him on the floor. Suddenly he checked and forgot all about the mouse; the trailer had come upon a new slot.

Before him, stretched across the passage from wall to wall, was a stout string. It was tied securely to a nail on each side, and was about five or six inches from the ground. Anybody coming along the passage without a light, or without looking closely where his feet were going, would have infallibly been thrown to the ground. Was this fresh ragging, or . . .? Colquhoun's lips closed

more firmly as he realised graver possibilities. He was nearing the end of the passage now: only two dormitories remained, Shawlands' and Clark's. Of the former there could be no suspicion: Shawlands was a loyalist, and his charges were harmless fags. Shawlands must have gone to bed safely: if the string had been there he would have fallen over and subsequently removed it. He would not have let any one out of his dorm while he was awake, and he had not been upstairs very long. Then some one must have recently put it up . . . some one from Clark's dorm? Possibly. . . . But why? In the ordinary course of events no one would come his way before morning. If they did . . . if any one did . . . he would fall over the string and . . . and advertise his presence to all whom it might concern. The captain's face grew grimmer as he stood up, thinking.

He did not think for long. Stepping over the string, he noiselessly made his way to Clark's dormitory. He listened for a moment, and then, without waiting longer, he put his hand on the door and flung it open. The gas was full on, but a rug brushed aside by the opening door showed that the inmates had guarded against light showing from between the door and the threshold. Seated on the floor in a circle, clad in dressing-gowns, were Clark, Watt, Merrifield, Wharton, Cole and Lutworth. By each was a heap of matches and

some miscellaneous coppers and silver. In the hands of each conspirator were playing-cards. Some discards and the rest of the pack were in the middle of the circle. Colquhoun looked down on the scene with disgust, and for a moment no one spoke. Then the captain said, "More poker, eh?"

Merrifield, Cole and Lutworth remained silent, thankfully conscious that a school monitor and two house monitors claimed more limelight than themselves. Wharton gave vent to a surly grunt; Clark laughed uneasily and threw an "After you, sir!" look at Watt. The footer captain stared at Colquhoun a moment, and then said calmly, "I open the jack-pot. Ante six."

None of the party was prepared for such a direct defiance, but bravado compelled imitation. Clark dropped his cards with disgust. "A fresh hand," he said coolly, and took five. Cole and Lutworth, conscious of weakness, but lacking Clark's bluffing powers and audacity, both passed. Merrifield drew a single card, Wharton a pair. And then Colquhoun spoke again—

"Do you fellows mean to stop this or not?" His voice was perfectly level, but perfectly determined.

"No," said Watt, gritting his teeth.

"Then I shall report you to-morrow to Chatham," said Colquhoun.

"You'd sneak?" sneered Clark, looking up from his hand.

"THEN THE CAPTAIN SAID: 'MORE POKER, EH?'"

"Yes," answered Colquhoun steadily; "I'd sneak."

"Look here," said Wharton uneasily; he had small stomach for extremes; "suppose we chuck this up—how about it?"

"What do you mean?" asked Colquhoun.

"I mean . . . what will you do if we chuck it and go to bed?"

"I shall report the poker business in any case to-morrow," said Colquhoun. "Three of you—Merrifield, Cole and Lutworth—have been warned already. You others are monitors. What's the use of talking? You know jolly well I'm not keen on reporting, but there's nothing else to do."

Merrifield broke in. He had decent instincts, and knew that they were deservedly in the cart.

"Look here, Colquhoun," he said, "it's only a rag. If we jack it up for good, will you keep your mouth shut?"

Colquhoun hesitated.

"You know poker is absolutely barred," he temporised, hoping for a lawful loophole.

Merrifield pressed his advantage.

"Yes," he admitted; "but we're only doing it for a rag. And it won't do the House any good if the buck footer men get hauled."

Colquhoun was painfully aware of this. He did not fear unpopularity, but . . . supposing Watt and the rest promised to chuck it? Would it not

be the statesmanlike thing to be merciful? . . . Yet they did not deserve to escape altogether. He thought for a moment before answering. Then he pronounced sentence.

"Look here!" he said quietly. "You're playing poker; you're playing for money——"

"Only a penny for fifty!" put in Wharton.

"Even that can mount up at poker: I know; but that's not the point. It's not the amount, it's the fact that you're betting. Several of you are out of your own dormitories, and you've refused to go back. It won't do. Dipcote doesn't *do* that. But you know I'm keen on having a decent House—a united House—behind me. I'll make you this offer: if you chaps will give me your word that you'll drop poker for good, pay back all debts to each other, and do five hundred lines apiece, I'll keep my mouth shut."

"You expect *me* to do lines for *you!*" said Watt, with blackening brows.

"Yes," said Colquhoun patiently, "I do. It's only fair. If you were a kid, you'd have to. If you refuse, I've no remedy except to report. I can't let this go by; I can't let you off altogether scot-free."

"Then, as far as I'm concerned," said Watt, "you may go and hang yourself. I suppose, you chaps, we all stand together over this?"

There was a sombre silence and then acquiescence.

Left to themselves, they might have accepted Colquhoun's sporting offer. As it was, none of them liked to desert Watt.

"You mean that!" said Colquhoun, turning to go with a sick heart.

"I bet three," said Watt, ignoring the appeal.

"And I raise you seven," said Clark. "Seven whole matches! What dogs we are!"

There was a laugh from the crowd, and the captain of Dipcote left the room.

CHAPTER XIX

Next day things moved swiftly. Colquhoun saw his housemaster between breakfast and first school and made his report. Mr. Chatham was astonished ("I am amazed. . . . Amazed to find that . . .") and not a little disturbed ("To think that boys in my house . . . and monitors! . . . It grieves me to admit . . ."). Immersed as he was in Greek Particles, Mr. Chatham had sense enough to recognise that discipline, the code, was in danger, and that the situation called for a big row. He took counsel with the Old Man, who grew grimmer every minute as the sorry tale unfolded. At twelve o'clock the malefactors were summoned to his study. The charge was stated by the Old Man: had they anything to say? No, sir. Indeed, what could they say? A brief homily dwelt on the dangers of betting, the wanton breach of rules, the futile defiance of lawful authority. "There may be defects in the monitorial system," said the Old Man, "but on the whole it's a good system—so long as the school tradition is to support it. You have done neither yourselves nor the school any

good by your folly, and I regard your action in a grave light." Then came the sentences, judicially apportioned, varied according to the position and guilt of the offenders. Merrifield, Lutworth and Cole were gated till the end of term and ordered to do five hundred lines. Wharton and Clark were to be deprived of their house monitorships, be gated, and do five hundred lines. "You may go now; Watt, kindly stay behind." The school footer captain remained, trying to assume an air of carelessness that sat badly upon him. The Old Man did not waste many more words. "Watt," he said quietly, "I am grievously disappointed. A fellow in your position should have known better. . . ." He paused a moment, hoping that the sullen pride would yield, but Watt made no sign. The Head went on: "I shan't depose you from the football captaincy, because I do not (at present) think it necessary. Besides, you can play football. But evidently you can't play the bigger game—at least, it doesn't look like it. I may be wrong . . . I should be willing to give you another chance, if you could hold out some hopes of realising the monitorial position. If you feel inclined to give me your word——"

"I'd rather not make any promises, sir," said Watt scornfully.

"Not even to help run the school as it should be run?" suggested the Old Man quietly. "Think

it over for five minutes. I have no wish to threaten a Sixth Former: in the first instance, I prefer to appeal to his *esprit de corps*."

He rose and walked to the window, leaving Watt to his problem. At the end of five minutes he came back and sat down.

"Well?" he said.

Watt looked him squarely in the eyes.

"I prefer to take my share like the rest," he said. "I'd rather be a free agent, sir."

"You would have had your share, in any case," said the Old Man quietly. "But if you had shown any signs of public spirit, I should not have gone to the extreme I contemplate. Under the circumstances, you will give up your monitorship, your house monitorship, be gated, and write five hundred lines by the end of the week. Now, you may go."

The news came as a bombshell to Chatham's, and later to the school at large. Fierce discussion raged for hours, for days, and inevitable divisions of opinion resulted. On the whole, Chatham's verdict was that the culprits had been treated rather sappily. Lines and gatings were all in the day's work, but to depose monitors from their august positions seemed pretty stiff. Watt and Clark had the advantage of being brilliant athletes and generally popular. Their slackness in bringing House offenders to book was also in their favour among the democracy. Colquhoun was liked, but

in a less degree, and respected. He was feared (in a decent sense) because he dropped on law-breakers with an unerring, if just, hand. Also, the fact that he had reported (or "sneaked") was against him. The fact that nothing else was open to him was not done justice to. Juvenile opinion is rarely impartial. All the studies, except Beaton, Shawlands and Price, were "in the cart": the Lower Study had a natural sympathy with spirits that found rules too cramping for generous, high-souled natures.

In common with the rest of the House, the Society of Raggers discussed the great event, meeting in the seclusion of the cave. It was Blythe who led the anarchistic section, and he spoke in unmeasured terms.

"I call it pretty low-down of Collie," he observed, impeded by a necessary banana. "If a chap can't keep order off his own bat, it's time he gave up. Collie's too big for his boots."

"That's 'cos you haven't forgotten last term's twanking," said Pettigrew sagely.

Blythe did not trouble to deny the charge.

"Well, and what if it is? Why should I be twanked, and other chaps get off? Why should——"

"Oh, dry up!" advised Duckworth. "You've got it on the brain, Chut. Not that I'm with Collie: I think it was a dirty trick. But you and your twanking——"

"I think Colquhoun is a decent chap," interposed Goss. "Watt's all right, but Clark is a beast——"

"Who wants a new kid's opinion?" asked Blythe. "Just because Collie lets you lick up the crumbs from his carpet——"

"Colquhoun's sound," said Sands abruptly, and subsided.

Pettigrew took up the tale.

"The point is," he observed, "that the House is now three monitors short. There's only Colquhoun, Beaton and Shawlands to look after things. Gentlemen——"

"'Brothers,' you ass!" corrected Duckworth.

The president apologised gracefully.

"Sorry, you chaps! I forgot the rule. Well, 'Brothers,' then. . . . What I mean is, if we're three monitors short it means less beastly detective work. We ought to be able to have some hefty ragging if——"

"D'you mean to rag Colquhoun or Watt?" asked Duckworth.

"Neither, you goat! But——"

"It comes to much the same in the end," argued Sands. "If we rag in front of Collie, we get biffed. If we rag in front of Watt——"

"He won't stop us."

"No, but when Collie hears of it he'll lam us just the same."

"And it'll show Watt we're keen on him," added Goss, sticking up for his patron.

"Well, aren't we?" asked Blythe.

"No, not exactly," said Goss steadily. "'Cos if we were, we'd be backing Clark, and I'm hanged if I'll back Clark."

"We'll vote on it," interposed the president. "Hands up, brothers, in favour of Watt and Free Ragging." Blythe, Duckworth and the president raised their hands. "Three. . . . Now, hands up for Collie." Sands, Goss and Caterham (who rarely dared to utter a word at any meeting) voted for the cause of law and order. "Three . . . it's a tie. . . . Then I give my casting vote as president in favour of Watt. . . . Of course, we must begin at once. Sorry, Goss, old man: but I'm afraid you'll have to make an apple-pie bed for Colquhoun to-night."

"Dashed if I do," said Goss. "And I don't believe in your rotten casting vote. We've never had one before."

"Because it's never been necessary," explained Pettigrew. "Really, it's quite all right. Every society has a casting vote—haven't they, Chut?"

"Two," replied Blythe, but Goss was deaf to the voice of the charmer. The meeting soon became distinctly heated, and at last broke up with mutual recriminations. Dissension seemed to be the prevailing spirit in Chatham's now.

But this particular breach was destined soon to be healed. That very afternoon Colquhoun sought out Watt. He made no reference to poker, but asked him if he meant to get the House teams into training soon. Watt replied succinctly that the House, as far as he was concerned, might look after itself. He added that neither he nor Clark meant to turn out for the Senior House team that year.

Colquhoun listened patiently.

"Please yourself," he said. "If you change your mind, you might let me know. I'll be glad if you *do* change your mind. Meanwhile, I mean to take charge. I can't play myself, but I intend to produce both a Senior and a Junior House fifteen, as usual. And I mean to make them turn out and train."

"You'll have a sweet job," sneered Watt.

"Possibly," said Colquhoun, unruffled. "But I mean to put it through."

"D'you think any of the studies will turn out?" asked Watt, grinding his teeth. "D'you think any decent chap wants to be skippered by a sneak?"

"I don't know," said Colquhoun, "but I have hopes. Anyhow, I'd rather make up a couple of teams of fags than see Chatham's not entering for the Inter-House Cup. Well, I had to see what you meant to do, as you're senior colour, and footer captain. Now that I know you're going to do nothing, I mean to go ahead."

He went ahead methodically, interviewing the studies first. Clark and Watt were determined non-starters: Wharton duly followed their lead. Beaton, of course, was faithful, and Shawlands announced that he jolly well meant to fight for the last place in the first House team pack. As Shawlands was no earthly good at footer, this showed a sporting spirit. Merrifield's study was non-committal. The truth was that they were keen to play, but felt sore and could not resist the chance of kicking Collie.

"We may or may not turn out," said Merrifield, ostentatiously opening a book.

"Haven't made up our minds yet," said Cole.

"But in all probability we shan't," was Lutworth's contribution. "Too busy doing the lines you kindly let us in for."

"Please yourselves," said Colquhoun courteously. "If you like to weaken the House team, you're at liberty to do so. Only . . . remember this . . . if you don't turn out to train every day till the house comp starts, I shan't pick you for either team."

"Excuse me asking," said Merrifield, with intentional insolence; "but . . . er . . . isn't Watt footer captain?"

"Of course he is," agreed Colquhoun cheerily: this open war was almost a relief after the secret hostility. "But as he's announced his intention of

letting the House run itself, I've taken the business into my own hands, house-footer included. It may seem like shoving myself in where I'm not wanted, but it's going to be *done*. See? By the way, Price, what about you?"

Price had been looking out of the window, taking no part in the discussion. He turned abruptly, with a slight flush.

"Me? Oh, of course, I'll turn out," he said, and that was all.

"Good man," said Colquhoun. "Two-fifteen on the Yards ground."

There was no question of interviewing the Lower Study. A curt, bald notice appeared. It said in effect that all who were neither halt, maimed, blind, diseased, or otherwise incapacitated, must turn out regularly for training at 2.15 till further notice. There was no intimation of either penalties or rewards. But the initials of the school captain were appended to the notice, and that was enough to ensure a good attendance. On the first day five slackers, presuming on the political situation, spent the training period in the Dipcote tuck-shop. The same night they called by request at the captain's study, and in due course emerged in fantastic attitudes. Inquisitive friends, anxious to know how they had fared, were repulsed with surly monosyllables: no details of the examination-in-chief were given. But those who ran might read

the indubitable signs, and next day there was not a single absentee : *the Lower Study turned out.* It would be untrue to say that all the fags turned out with enthusiasm. The Colquhoun party—a minority, but a strong minority—trained eagerly. Of the rest who appeared under duresse, some were filled with an active resentment against the sneak who interfered with personal liberty : a few were genuine slackers who hated to bother about footer unless the weather was fine. But the golden, outstanding fact remained that all—loyalists, rebels, and frowsters —turned out.

And on the third day of training an incident helped to pour oil on a few of the troubled waters. Colquhoun, of course, could not train with the rest, owing to his knee. But he could help Beaton and Shawlands by keeping the roster and coaching by word of mouth—demonstrating how a scrum should be linked up on the best " three-two-three " principles—showing the method of " screwing the scrum "—picking out a likely line to practise passing and dribbling, and so on. And while Beaton was taking charge of promising three-quarters, Colquhoun organised a game of " Double Tommy," otherwise known as " Bar-the-Door " or " Prisoners' Base." One fellow stood in the middle of the ground, while others ran across. The centre man tried to collar a foe : the capture then remained in the centre, and so on till all were taken. It is a

capital game to practise collaring. Watching for weak spots, Colquhoun's keen eye soon spotted that Pettigrew, whatever his other excellences, undoubtedly funked going for his man. Instead of flinging himself wholeheartedly at the knees, the President of the Raggers clawed vainly at the shoulders. Presently the captain called him : " Hi ! Pettigrew ! Come over here ! " Sensibly he did not put the reluctant president to public shame : he knew a better way to teach the tackle. Taking Pettigrew by the arm, he walked down the field, expounding the practical wisdom acquired by seven seasons of Dipcote football. " You're funking the collar," he said, with friendly criticism. " That won't do for Chatham's. Mind you, I don't think that's marvellous—you're not the first chap in the world to funk a tackle. I know it looks awful, but really it's chiefly knack, *plus* chucking your heart into it. When I was a kid I was just the same till a chap taught me. I used to funk, same as you——"

" What ! " said the president, round-eyed. " You funked, Colquhoun ! Oh, rot ! "

" 'Tisn't rot ! " laughed the captain. " It's true : I *did* funk, but I was only a kid then—same as you." (The president overlooked the failure in tact, interested in the footer tips, not unpleased to find the school captain's hand on his shoulder.) " Now, if you have a tendency to funk, be sensible—

don't increase it by going for a big man first. Start at the bottom. Begin by tackling a small chap whom you *don't* funk, and work up to the bigger game. If you take it gradually it's perfectly easy. See?"

"Yes, Colquhoun. Thanks, awfully. I'll——"

"Now, there's Peters . . . go and try tackling him first. When you've grassed Peters, go for Charteris. Grasp the idea?"

"Yes, Colquhoun. Thanks, awfully."

Pettigrew retired, conscious that the captain's eye was upon him, filled with ambition. If an ex-First fifteen man like Colquhoun did not mind admitting that once he had funked, surely Pettigrew might one day follow in his steps. He "grassed" Peters without difficulty, and (at the third attempt) performed a like office on Charteris. When training stopped for the day, Pettigrew had manfully and neatly collared no fewer than five men, one of whom was undeniably bigger and heavier than himself. He had failed four times running to tackle the enormous giant Lorimer, but there was to-morrow to look forward to. . . . To-morrow. . . . Pettigrew undressed that night meditating methods of entwining himself round Lorimer's knees . . . and then he might have hopes of attacking Gordon, who looked knobby. . . .

"By the way," he said carelessly, as he tied his pyjama strings; "I've been thinking about that

casting-vote business, young Goss. I'm not sure that there isn't something in what you said—not sure that we ought to have a casting vote until the rules provide for it. Must run the society on a regular plan, you know."

"D'you mean," asked Blythe, "that we should vote whether the president has a casting vote or not? Wouldn't there be a tie again?"

"Possibly," said Pettigrew, with increased carelessness. "But we can settle that later. Suppose we take a vote on the old question first and see?"

On a division the original voting suffered a change. It was now four to two in favour of Colquhoun. Blythe's amendment that "decent" ragging be still permissible was carried unanimously. There was no need to order haloes yet.

CHAPTER XX

"Moral Suasion," decreed Mr. Cope, with an air of finality. "That's the watchword of to-day, and a most excellent watchword too. Moral suasion! It ought to be inscribed in letters of gold on every classroom in every British school."

He delivered himself of this in the masters' common room, where a number of the Dipcote staff was assembled after dinner, smoking, chatting, or reading the papers. The Fourth Form master, Mr. Perkins, voiced the general dissent.

"It's more of a catchword than a watchword, Cope," he said. "Moral suasion is all very well in its place, and provided you've got a cane on view in the corner, in case moral suasion doesn't prove wholly adequate."

"Violence! The old, brutal cry of violence!" complained Percy, passing his hand wearily over his brow. "'If you can't teach a boy, hit him!' It's positively painful to think that such savage ethics still hold in the twentieth century."

"And a good job they do," said Tait, the newest and most youthful addition to the staff. "Take

that lout Hopkinson, for example. He can't *understand* anything but the threat of personal, physical suffering. If any one tried to morally persuade——"

"Split infinitive," murmured Melton, who had a first in Greats and a tired manner. "You illiterate Tabs——"

"Oh! go back to Oxford and learn how to spell 'pedant,'" returned Tait briskly. "If any one tried to morally persuade Hopkinson to do some work, he'd be a Rip van Winkle in a couple of years."

"My contention is," Percy went on quickly, to forestall other interrupters, "that all this violence is not merely immoral: it's futile. It exasperates the boy——"

"Oh, undoubtedly!"—sarcasm from Perkins.

—"brutalises the master, and fails of its object."

"Hopkinson knew his rep this morning, anyhow," claimed Tait. "His last licking hasn't had time to wear off yet."

"Granting your conclusion," lectured Percy, "I deny its premise. And even for the sake of argument, supposing I admitted that fear of consequences produced some spasmodic effort——"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Tait, much in the manner of the Society of Raggers. (He was not yet twenty-two.) "When you've had your leg pulled to your heart's content, you'll be glad to borrow my canes."

Mr. Cope left the common room with offended dignity: argument was wasted on these—these—he sought for a suitable word. He found it at last and licked his lips. "These Bœotians." He did not go and eat coke as Tait had advised. Instead, he summoned a hapless junior, whom he wished to influence, to go for a walk. Yarborough, the junior in question, having no excuse ready and being obviously disengaged, felt obliged to comply. For three solid quarters of an hour they walked, while Percy held forth on the higher life, the value and importance of industry, the immorality of cheating (Yarborough had been caught that morning looking out words in the vocabulary during Cæsar), and the deleterious effect of a flesh dietary. "And what he was driving at half the time," complained Yarborough, dropping exhausted on a bench in the School House changing-room after his return, "I'm blessed if I can say. He jawed and Jawed and JAWED. I'd have fallen asleep as I walked, only the ass kept saying, 'Don't you agree with me, my boy?' or, 'Can you point out any hi—something——'"

"*Hiatus*," suggested a listener. "We had it in Vergil this morning. It means a gap."

"That's the bally word," said Yarborough. "*Hiatus*. 'Can you point out any *hiatus* in the argument?' Fancy *me* pointing out a *hiatus!*" He almost frothed at the idea. Finally he found

comfort, or at least a gag, in a borrowed apple.

The first lesson of afternoon school for the Third Form that day was dictation. At four o'clock Mr. Cope entered the room to find a number of boys engaged in whistling, singing, and beating each other about the head with note-books. This was not outside the usual programme of those classes fortunate enough to be taken by Percy. "Sit down, boys!" he requested. (The moral suasor is averse from despotic orders which savour of Violence.) "Sit down . . . sit down . . . lessons now, please!"

An anonymous voice, from the heart of the hurly-burly, gave a melodious and faithful rendering of the abbey chimes: "*Sit* down—*sit* down—*sit* down—*sit* down! *Sit* down—*sit* down—*sit* down—*sit* down!" And then, even as the clock strikes the hour with a deep and harmonious boom, half-a-dozen voices began, "*Down!*" . . . Pause. . . . "*Down! . . . Down!*"

"Hush, please!" said Percy mildly, beginning to unlock his desk.

Objections began.

"Oh, please, sir! Mayn't we strike the hour? It's four o'clock, and we only struck three." ("*Down!*") "Of course not, Charteris! A preposterous request!" ("*Down!*") "Please, sir, he's struck *five*, and it's only four!" "Can't we have five minutes, sir, to get accustomed——"

(" *Down !* ") " Shut up, you ass ! That's *my* pen, not yours ! " " Ass yourself ; I brought it——" (" *Down !* ") " Dictation, now, boys ! Open your books. Rule a margin on the left-hand side——" (" *Down !* ") " I must ask you to be quiet now, please ! Charteris, open your book ! Pettigrew, kindly give Blythe the pen I saw you take from him ! " (" *Down !* ") " Yarborough, after this afternoon I had hoped . . . Goss, it really does not assist progress " (" *Down !* ") " to kick a boy in front of you. . . . Now, let us begin. . . ."

Somehow or other the din subsided, the form settled itself unwillingly, took up its pens, and resigned itself to one of Cope's spasmodic efforts. The word " Dictation " was laboriously written on top-lines, the full stop added after incredible exertions, and then : " Please, sir, may we have the window shut ? "

" My dear boy, fresh air is as necessary as bread to the human frame. A stuffy room in which one absorbs carbonic acid——"

" Oh, but, please, sir ! It's so cold ! I've got a draught whistling down my neck ! "

" You may change your seat, Duckworth, if you feel a draught ! " (Percy prided himself on being utterly just, utterly fair, eager to listen to reasonable arguments.)

" Please, sir ! I feel the draught too ! May I change my seat as well ? "

"Yes, Hinkle, if you *really* feel a draught. By all means——"

"And, please, sir! May I change mine?"

"Well, Tomlinson, if you are sure——"

"Oh! I'm quite sure, sir! The wind simply blows me out of my seat!"

"In that case . . . Jopling, you must not stand up without permission! I cannot allow——"

"Please, sir," pleaded Jopling, "Tomlinson was keeping the draught off me. Now that he's moved I get the full force of the wind. I thought you wouldn't mind——"

Percy rose with something like ill-temper. "You seem extremely afraid of a little ventilation," he observed acidly, as he walked across the room. "Of course, I don't want you to sit in discomfort. . . . Well, I will shut the lower half of the window and leave the upper half open." The lower half, of opaque or "frosted" glass, was closed. "Is that any better?"

"Much better, sir, thank you!" "Oh, *very* much better, sir!" "Thank you, sir! You *are* kind!" "Oh, *so* kind, sir! We do appreciate it!" "Saved my life, sir! Another minute and I should have had peumonia!" ("*Pneumonia*, you ass!") "Sir, please, is it pneumonia or peumonia?" And then, in a low hum, "Percy is a peerless, perfect, little pet!" There are times when a wise master knows it is best to ignore small

breaches of authority: Mr. Cope decided that the low hum was not loud enough to be heard officially. Pulling himself together, he began to dictate in a high voice, hoping to conquer a busy and intermittent drone of conversation. In a measure he succeeded. Pens scratched, heavy breathing began to be heard, heads lolloped on arms. For a few minutes all went well. Then Hinkle said—

"Please, sir! The window's shut!"

Percy looked up in astonishment. Yes: the words of Hinkle were true. The upper half of the window, so recently open, was now shut. Had some one dared——?

"Did any of you boys in the back row get up and close the window while I was dictating?" asked Percy, with some acerbity. "I must confess that after the consideration I have tried to show——"

"No, sir! no, sir!" The back row chorussed in sincere and virtuous indignation. "We didn't do it, sir! Wouldn't think of doing it, after you'd been so decent, sir!" "We know you're a sportsman, sir!" (A Voice: "We *don't* think!") "Look, sir! it's far too high for us to reach without climbing up!"

And it was even so. Unless a boy climbed on the window-sill or had the pole with the head-catch (made for opening windows) he could not have shut the window. Mystified and rather petulant, Percy took the pole from its resting-place by the door,

and pulled down the top window again. Then he resumed the lesson, walking slowly about the room while he dictated.

Five precious and comparatively peaceful minutes elapsed before the voice of Sands said, "Sir! Sir!" in high-pitched agitation.

Percy turned. "What is it, Sands? There is no need for excitement. Are you unwell?"

"No, sir, but the window is shut again!"

The whole form swung round with Percy to focus this portent. Mr. Cope almost rubbed his eyes. He had been walking round: he had heard no noise: true, there *had* been some buzzing conversation and occasional dropped books, but nothing out of the way; yet . . . here was the window shut! Somewhat uncertainly he tried to pass it off with an ingratiating laugh.

"Don't let us have any more of this nonsense, boys!" he said. "I can appreciate a joke in season, but a joke repeated loses all its point."

"But, sir, it isn't us!" "We didn't do anything, sir!" "Sir . . . sir . . r . . r . . r" (in a sanctimonious whine), "it's unkind to accuse us when we're innocent." "Hinnercent as a biby," added Blythe, in a cockney twang that every one, except Mr. Cope, enjoyed thoroughly. Goss offered a helpful suggestion, or rather question. "Do you think it could be a ghost, sir?" At once the idea was taken up. The class huddled together in

attitudes of extreme terror, shivering visibly. "A ghost, sir! *Brrrrrrrr!* Oh, please, sir! *Brrrrrrrr!* Don't let it be a ghost!"

"How could I 'LET' it be a ghost?" asked Percy, not unreasonably, suppressing a thirst for the savage ethics he had so recently condemned. "There are no such things as ghosts. Do not be so childish. Open the window, please, Blythe . . . take the pole . . . thank you. . . . Now, let us get on."

With extreme unwillingness the Third Form allowed itself to be goaded to the task once more. More than one critic pointed out that it was impossible to keep an eye on the mysterious window so long as one's back was turned towards it. Yarborough (to the grief of the wielder of influence) even suggested that they might be allowed to sit round and write on their knees. Mr. Cope, in acute irritation and perplexity, backed up his veto with a hundred lines. An anguished "Ooooh, *sir!*" failed to excite any emotion of the softer type, and the lesson went on.

Percy, convinced that there were no such things as ghosts, was equally convinced that some one was pulling his leg. How, he had not the faintest idea. Determined to get to the bottom of it all (for unless there is full knowledge, moral suasion cannot have free scope, not to speak of violence being an absolute non-starter) he kept an eye on the window.

Perpetual glancing from the book to the pane, and *vice versa*, gave promise of oblique vision, unless something happened pretty soon. The watcher's vigilance was rewarded in due course. His faith in the veracity of the Third, which had received a severe shock during the past twenty minutes, was restored; but his personal equanimity was not materially enhanced. About ten minutes after the last interruption Mr. Cope's eye was arrested by an object that moved athwart the heavens. He saw through the top pane (the bottom was frosted, you remember) a walking-stick, apparently self-propelled, moving cautiously, furtively, towards the top of the frame. Percy's jaw dropped in sheer surprise. His voice failed: he could do nothing but watch. The Third Form, struck by the sudden silence, looked up and followed Percy's eyes. There was a faint gasp of pure joy as they saw the phenomenal stick; but no one was ass enough to make a row and spoil it all. Instead, they watched the walking-stick gently engage with the window-frame. . . . A pause to make sure. . . . Then, very slowly, very gently, very noiselessly, with the most painful and exacting care, the stick by tenths of inches pushed up the window till it closed. "*Ah-h-h!*" breathed the Third Form, restraining a desire to clap. Mr. Cope drew in his breath with angry determination. He had had time to think during the spectacle. The veriest child (say, Macaulay's schoolboy) knew

that a walking-stick to act thus must be propelled by some one. Behind the frosted window-pane was lurking—who? Even a moral suasor can act on occasion. Without stopping to take off his gown (and that was a mistake), Percy opened the door and dashed from the room. In three seconds the entire Third Form was fighting for places at the window. The jam was horrible, but at last the lower pane was flung up, and five lucky, lucky creatures wedged themselves delightedly over the sill. Others climbed upon their backs. Of these latter fortunates Blythe was one, and he described the scene for the benefit of the clamorous and disappointed throng behind.

"He's cut! The chap's cut, and Percy's after him! Like a hare—a bally hare! His old gown's floating in the wind—looks like a great bird swooping after! Who is it? I dunno! Some kid . . . looks like Walters, or it might be Caxton. . . . No, now I think it might be Duffield—looks something like Duffield's stride. . . . Golly! Oh, well done! good biz! good biz!"

"What is it? Oh, what is it?" whooped the audience, fighting like dogs for places that could not have been bought with gold.

"He's gone to the Fives Courts! Ass! Ass! He's bound to be nailed! No! he's not. . . . He's jinked and made for the gym . . . now he's round. . . . If Percy had any notion he'd double and meet

him coming back. . . . Oh, I *hope* he doesn't! I *hope* he doesn't! . . . Good old Percy! He's chasing all the way. . . . They're out of sight now. . . . Don't squeeze, you selfish brutes! . . . Here they come . . . back again . . . blowing like grampuses, I'll bet. . . . I can see them. . . . (Don't SQUEEZE, you swine!) It *is* Duffield—good old Duffie! Percy can't last the course . . . he's dropping—oh! my *aunt*, what a rag!"

The squeeze stopped suddenly. Unable to bear any more, the Third Form emptied itself out of the room by a unanimous impulse. Rushing out *en masse*, they were just in time to see Duffield flying past, panting, pale with fear of the doom he felt approaching, but triumphant and game to the marrow. Out of the gate he flew and into the open road, bound—heaven knew whither! Fleet-footed, but labouring none the less, came Percy, thirty yards in rear, all thoughts of moral suasion now mere heresies, dead beyond recall. His one desire was blood, and plenty of it; but his thirst was destined to go unslaked. As he dashed like an arrow through the gate his streaming gown caught the post. The gown was bound with stout braid. It did not tear. Percy went down on the gravel like a shot rabbit. . . .

"*e-e-e-E-E-E-E-E-E-H-H*," said the Third Form.

CHAPTER XXI

Duffield's escape was only temporary, for Percy had recognised him before the hunt was fully up. Duffield was licked earnestly by the Old Man, but the pangs were more than assuaged by the fulsome adulation that was his for many a long day. He became, in fact, a Dipcote legend, and to this day any fag of more than a term's standing will take you without fee or reward over the route traversed by him and Percy. In a sense, and wholly unconsciously, he served the cause of law and order. Rags such as he had inspired and achieved helped to blow off steam. The juniors found conversation on the topic a desirable thing between tea and prep; and while one is discussing relative speeds and "times," or the resisting quality of gowns, there is small chance for idle hands finding unlawful opportunities for action. Mr. Cope was an involuntary martyr: his sufferings in school hours reacted favourably on the peace of Chatham's.

And there was peace of a sort, even though it seemed at times more like an armed truce between combatants watching each other for a good opening.

The thunderbolts that had been hurled by the Old Man kept the disaffected studies quiet, if sulky, for a season. So far as was known, there was no more poker. Free entrance to the studies was assured. The dorms were safe, for Colquhoun saw to it that the gas in the corridors was left burning and his own dorm door kept wide open. Now, no one could leave another dorm without extreme risk, even if (which was unlikely) an ardent rebel meditated nocturnal wanderings. The Lower Study—at least, the disorderly faction—contemplated with respectful resentment the united front of Colquhoun, Beaton and Shawlands. Some ragging, of course, took place, but nothing flagrantly uproarious or patently illegal came to light. But to say that things went smoothly would be untrue. "Order reigned in Warsaw," but there had been divers executions. An armed truce may give a breathing-spell, but swords must be dropped before one can sleep peacefully o' nights.

The most encouraging feature in the general situation was observable towards the end of March. Some sixteen days after the pursuit of Duffield Mr. Cope retired into private life. This was not due to his betrayal of the moral suasion theory: it was because Mr. Baxendale had recovered from the 'flu and returned to duty. Percy went back to London, not quite so ardent a theorist as heretofore, convinced that private coaching offered more scope for his

peculiar talents, deeply regretted by the volatile juniors who knew a man (and Bax!) when they saw him. Bax returned unheralded. He had sent his luggage in advance and walked up from the station. Half a mile from Dipcote he fell in with Mr. Chatham and they came home together.

"Yes, I got your letter all right," said Mr. Chatham, as he turned. "I'm very glad to see you again, Baxendale. You've been missed."

"Things gone all right, sir?" asked Baxendale, swinging his cane. He was glad to get back to it all again, sick of convalescing, keen to be in the thick of things.

"On the whole, ye-es," returned Chatham vaguely. "That is, until about a fortnight ago. Before that, I believe the House moved much on its usual lines. Occasionally there was a certain amount of noise . . . perhaps a little more noise than is customary. . . . I don't know. . . . But then, most unexpectedly, there was something in the nature of an upheaval . . . a very disturbing disclosure. . . . I was amazed, astounded, I may say, to find . . ."

"—some of the fags gorging in the dormitories?" laughed Bax. He knew that it did not take much to amaze Mr. Chatham.

"I wish it had been only that, Baxendale. No. . . . Some of the biggest boys in the House playing poker."

"Poker!" said Bax, with quickened interest. This was news, and of an unwelcome type.

"It is a game of cards," explained Mr. Chatham, misunderstanding Bax's tone. "I do not profess to understand it myself, but I am told it is American in origin, popular with the denizens of mining camps and—ah!—saloons, as I believe they term public-houses over there. Oh, yes! a game of chance rather than of skill, lacking the mathematical fascination of chess, but affording, apparently, unlimited possibilities for gambling."

"I know, sir," said Bax grimly. "But who were the fellows? You never wrote——"

"I didn't want to worry you while you were away," said Chatham. "And, of course, it was only discovered about a fortnight ago . . ."

He gave full details of the upheaval, the junior housemaster looking grimmer every minute. Bax could guess at possibilities that were hidden from the eyes of Chatham, and he was anxious to hear Colquhoun's account as soon as possible. They were close to the school by the time Chatham had finished his recital. It was a half holiday, about five o'clock, when footer was over, "brewings" past or passing, when fellows were rather at a loose end, wondering whether they should yarn a bit more, read, or in desperation do a little work (or rag) before tea. As the two masters swung past the gym and the Third Form, a little procession

emerged from Chatham's House. It was a sample of the still popular fish train, consisting of a dozen or so fags, headed by Cole and Lutworth.

"Hello! what's this?" said Bax, staring.

Mr. Chatham peered over his glasses.

"I don't exactly know," he admitted, gazing at the approaching train. "Once or twice lately I've seen this . . . er . . . this sort of thing. I suppose they find some pleasure in it, though why, it would be hard to say. Boys are curious creatures."

"They are," agreed Bax, stopping to watch the animated crocodile. "If you don't mind, sir, I think I'll have a word with these chaps."

"Do, by all means," said Chatham cordially. "I shall hurry on, for I've some letters to write. You'll find your room ready. I spoke to the matron about it this morning. . . . At least . . ." He paused doubtfully. "*Did* I speak to the matron? I know that I meant to. . . . Well, I will speak to her now and make sure."

He passed on, leaving Mr. Baxendale to investigate the piscatorial curiosity that was fast coming nearer. As soon as the train caught sight of Bax there was a perceptible loosing in the ranks. A spirit of doubt seemed to make itself felt . . . a consciousness that all was not well . . . a sense of superior disapproval wrapping itself clammily about the component parts. After some muttered

protests, ejaculations, nudges, and recriminations the fish train somehow found itself disintegrated—no one knew exactly the manner thereof. It was a knot of rather sheepish juniors that halted, laughing uneasily, about the figure of Bax.

"Well!" he said simply, after inspecting their persons, their clothes, their boots, with an embracing glance that said plainly, "From what asylum have *you* gentlemen escaped?" "Well, is this an address of welcome or what?"

There was an embarrassed silence. Then somebody (neither Cole nor Lutworth, who began to remember that their home was not the Lower Study) said, "It's a fish train, sir!"

"H'm . . ." said Bax, again appraising their boots, their clothes, their persons. His eyebrows said this time, "Poor fellows . . . poor fellows . . . then it's as I feared. . . . How sad! How unutterably sad!" "A fish train . . . A fish train!" The words, as spoken by Mr. Baxendale, sounded incredibly childish and absurd. How *could* anybody but the newest fag ever have taken delight in . . . a fish train? It was simply unthinkable. . . . ". . . A fish train!" Bax repeated, meditating. . . . Then, more briskly and with extreme decision, "Well, if you find these . . . er . . . these 'fish trains' a gentle recreation in your offtimes, I don't know that they're exactly illegal . . . But, I *hardly* think I'd advertise Chatham's *quite* so

publicly. . . . You see, people might not understand . . ."

The inference, of course, that "people" would draw was that we were cretins, or, at the kindest, a kindergarten of a rather backward type. What ass had suggested a fish train just when Bax was on the scene? Cole? Lutworth? Chaps of their size ought to have had more dignity, or at least gumption. Or was it Lorimer? Chump! Trebly a chump! Lorimer was always getting us into a row. Not Lorimer? Then who the dickens *was* it? Personally, we should never have dreamed of being such fools as to go outside Chatham's, unless some brainless and luckily anonymous imbecile had proposed it. If only one could be certain who the lout was. . . . Mr. Baxendale left an audience that presented a somewhat wilted appearance, vaguely conscious that a change was coming o'er the spirit of their dream—that dream in which Percy had appeared as a benignant sprite of wishèd fancy, marred only by the demoniac intrusions of Colquhoun or kindred law-abiding goblins.

Devotees of the fish train were not the only uncomfortable creatures in Chatham's. On the night of Bax's return four of them—Watt, Clark, Wharton, and Merrifield—were sitting in Clark's study throughout prep. They had not made any pretence of working: they were resolved into a committee of ways and means. Backwards, for-

wards and round about had they discussed a series of problems, without finding any satisfactory answers. Tempers had become strained: had they been members of the Lower Study they might have come to blows ere this.

"The long and short of it is," said Watt gloomily, "that we seem to be in rather a mess. Whitehead is getting past a joke: the thing can't go on like this very much longer."

"You said that half an hour ago," was Merrifield's petulant contribution. "If we can't get any farther than that, we might as well chuck gassing."

Watt scowled but made no reply. Clark, who had been playing with a pencil, looked up.

"Reduced to its lowest terms," he said smoothly, "we want money. Rather, we must have money, or find ourselves in a hole. Most of us appear to be cleaned out. Anyhow, I know that I am. Watt and Wharton say the same . . ." He paused significantly.

Merrifield turned on him quickly.

"And I'm cleaned out too, almost," he said. "Why do you look at me like that?"

"Of course, you're—er—almost cleaned out," agreed Clark, smiling a little unpleasantly. "I wasn't suggesting the contrary. Only . . ."

"Only what?"

"Well, you've got a governor," said Clark.

"He seems always ready to dub up when you ask him. For the life of me I can't see why you shouldn't touch him again."

"I've told you once," said Merrifield, rather heatedly, "that in his last letter he said he wasn't going to send me any more dibs this term, as I'd been spending too much. He pitched it in stronger than that, as a matter of fact. What's the sense of harping on my governor?"

"He seems to be our only hope," returned Clark, with some venom. "Personally, if I had a rich governor and knew my pals were hard up, I wouldn't stick at tackling him a dozen times. Especially when one has received favours——"

"Favours!" cried the angry Merrifield. "The only favours I've had from you were a lot of rotten tips that never came off——"

"They did sometimes," corrected Watt, with unwilling candour. "Jedbury gave us a few winners, but he handed out a mighty lot of losers too."

"And you were glad enough of the tips at the time," said Clark. "It's all very well to grouse now——"

"I'm not grousing at losing," protested Merrifield. "I'm grousing at your jawing about favours. We're all in the same boat over the gees. What other 'favours' were there?"

Clark paused for a minute. Then he said

meaningly, "Well . . . at least you won't deny that you were lucky at poker."

Merrifield flushed, but controlled himself. "What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing!" said Clark airily. "Only it's a fact. When we totted up after the last game and compared notes, you were the only chap who'd won."

"D'you mean that I swindled?" asked Merrifield, rising.

"Don't be a goat, Merry," said Watt impatiently. "Of course he doesn't."

Wharton followed suit with a mumbled, "Silly ass!"

But Merrifield refused to be silenced.

"If he doesn't mean that, what does he mean?" he cried. "I *did* win at poker, I know: but it was a square deal all round."

"Of course, it was a square deal," said Clark, still smiling unpleasantly. "I'm not saying a word against you. I'm simply pointing out that you were the only chap who won."

"Oh, chuck it!" said Watt, sick of the wrangle; but things had gone too far.

Merrifield gripped the edge of the table in his anger. His words poured forth.

"You bally swab!" he said, glaring at Clark. "Hinting at things like that! As if I'd do such a dirty trick as swindle at cards! And it was

you that showed us poker—you that got us the tips——"

"Which you were glad to get," put in Clark.

"—you that borrowed money from me time after time when you were hard up. And you haven't paid back a cent yet! And on the top of all that, you hint that I cheat! 'Pon my sam, you make me sick! I wish to goodness I'd plenty of dibs in my pocket now! If I had, I'd cheerfully give you back all I've won from you and wipe off your debts to me into the bargain. I believe I'd feel . . . I'd feel sort of clean from your touch again!"

"Talk's cheap," commented Clark, smiling all the time. "I didn't know you were such an orator."

Merrifield felt in his pockets, trembling with rage. "I said I was almost cleaned out," he spluttered, "and it's true. I've got about seven bob. What's the good of that when I owe Whitehead three quid? But anyhow, it's all I've got, and you can jolly well take it and be hanged to you!" He flung the silver down on the table. "There, you—you swab!" he stormed. "Take it and go to blazes! Take your beastly tip like a beastly flunkey! I'm done with you for good!"

He flung out of the study, shaking with passion, banging the door behind him.

For a few moments there was silence. Then Clark, apparently quite unruffled, said pleasantly,

"What a naughty, naughty little boy! I had no idea Merrifield could make such a horrid exhibition of himself. It's quite distressing."

Wharton said nothing. It seemed that Merrifield's outburst had sealed lips which were never voluble.

Watt shifted uneasily and said, "You shouldn't have baited him, Clark. It was a rotten sort of thing to hint——"

"My dear man, do you think I meant he had cheated? Of course, I never dreamed he'd take it seriously——"

"All the same, it was a rotten thing to say," persisted Watt. "No fellow likes that sort of thing even in fun. . . . Hello! what are you doing?"

Clark was sweeping up the tumbled coins into his pocket. "No need to leave this lying about," he said easily.

Watt's frown lifted.

"Of course not. When shall you return them? After prayers? If I were you I'd wait till to-morrow when he's not in such a tan."

"Catch me returning them!" laughed Clark. "If a fellow chooses to blackguard me like that and chuck money about, why, he deserves to be fined for his cheek."

"But you're not going to stick to the dibs!" said Watt, in amazement. "Great Scott, man! After what he said——"

"You sentimental ass!" said Clark, jingling the coins. "Hard words break no bones. If it eases Merrifield's sensitive soul to pay back what he won at poker, I'm not going to object. Who would?"

Watt got up, sick with disgust.

"I would," he said, with loathing, and walked to the door. He opened it and paused. "And I should think," he added bitterly, "that any man with a grain of decency or self-respect would do the same."

Clark laughed.

"You and Merrifield are wasted here," he said. "You ought to go on the stage."

CHAPTER XXII

During the next few days Mr. Baxendale was exceedingly busy in a quiet, unobtrusive way. Like the Tar Baby of priceless memory, he lay low: unlike that darksome infant, he said a good deal. He had a yarn with Beaton, to his great content. He had a yarn with Colquhoun, to his equally great content. He had some remarks with the Raggers' Society. He had a long yarn with the Old Man, who told him much and hinted at more. "You'll have heard that Watt has ceased to be a monitor," he said, playing with a paper-knife as they smoked together one evening. "A pity, but Watt had a responsible position and abused it. There was no other course."

"Any chance of putting him back, Chief?" asked Bax, re-filling his pipe.

The Old Man glanced at him.

"If you could give me a reason, I'd be glad," he replied. "If Watt showed any glimmerings of public spirit, one might think of it . . . next term, perhaps. But Watt hasn't taken things well."

"I'm inclined to think, sir, that it's more weak-

ness than wickedness in his case. He might pull up yet. I fancy he's been influenced. . . ."

"You mean, by Clark?"

Bax nodded.

"Ah! . . . . I've had my eye on Clark for some little time. Nothing flagrant, beyond that poker business. But . . . head masters are not so blind as they're sometimes supposed to be."

Bax grinned, knowing that there were few tricks of the trade to which the Old Man was blind. For the time being they talked of other things. When the junior housemaster rose to go, the Old Man said—

"I'll bear Watt in mind, Baxendale. Remember, if you can show me any good reason for restoration, I'll be glad."

The next day by a curious coincidence the football captain had tea in Mr. Baxendale's room. No one else was present. After the achievements of the Dipcote fifteen had been thoroughly discussed, Bax went straight to the point. "I say," he observed, lying back in his big armchair, "I wish you'd tell me a thing. You needn't if you don't want to, of course; but I should very much like to know why you aren't going to play for the House this year."

The question did not surprise Watt. Ever since Bax had returned the footer captain had known there would be questions. He had expected an invitation to tea and "a talk"—had expected a cross-examination

and was prepared with an answer. He replied steadily and not without dignity, "The fact is that Colquhoun and I don't get on—don't pull together."

"I knew that, of course," said Bax. "When you and Colquhoun agreed to separate studies. I'd hoped that difference might have adjusted itself by now."

"It hasn't," said Watt bluntly. "There's no need to beat about the bush and pretend."

"Not the least," agreed Bax. "Of course I'm sorry, but that's a personal matter between you and him. All the same, I don't see why the House team should suffer because you've had a row."

Watt was silent. If Bax thought he could blarney him over . . .

"I hear that Clark isn't turning out, either," pursued Bax. "Nobody else, so far as I know, is there?"

"No," said Watt.

Merrifield, Cole, and Lutworth, when the crisis came, had turned out to train. And so had Wharton—why, it was not very clear. Whether the fear of public opinion, the possible return of Bax, or the desire to retain his House cap, was the predominant reason, nobody knew. But Wharton had turned out.

"Well, I'm glad there's nobody else," said Bax. "But I'm sorry that our two stars think of punishing

the House. However, if you've settled the matter definitely——"

"It is settled—definitely," said Watt, gritting his teeth.

"Then we won't discuss it any more," said Bax. "I'm sorry. . . . But about yourself. . . . Of course, I've heard of the monitorship, and . . . again I'm sorry."

"I'm not!" said Watt defiantly. At all costs he would not appear "soft" to Bax.

The master looked keenly at him.

"Why not?" he asked. "I used to think you not half a bad chap. There was a time when I hoped you'd be a lot of use to Dipcote."

Watt sat grimly silent. He had some difficulty in controlling himself under this well-meaning, pally sort of talk. But if Bax thought . . .

"It's not long since you lost it," Bax went on quietly. "Perhaps you think it doesn't matter so very much . . . yet. But it's your last year at Dipcote. There's all the summer term to look forward to——"

"Very likely I shan't be here next term," burst out Watt. "Very likely I shall leave at the end of this——"

"Why?" asked Bax, surprised.

Watt made no answer. He stood up, looking more than miserable. "Oh, what does it matter?" he said, rather thickly. "What's the use of trying

this sort of thing on? I think I'd better trot and——"

"You sit down," said Bax peremptorily, and somehow Watt found himself again in the chair. The master eyed him keenly, sympathetically, for a moment before he spoke. "Look here, old chap!" he said gently. "If I can be of any use to you, I wish you'd let me. You ought to know by this time that I don't go about telling tales. You seem to be in some sort of a hole. Can't you tell me what's up? What's all this rot about leaving this term?"

Watt looked at him wretchedly. He had been "in a hole" for no little time. Pride had made him let the House slide, entangled him with Clark, put everything out of gear; and he was reaping the fruits. They didn't taste good. His determination weakened. At least, Bax was a good sort . . . if tactless. . . . He knew he didn't tell tales. . . .

"It's decent of you to talk like that," he muttered. "I am in a hole. As a matter of fact I've been betting. I owe a man—a bookie—about four pounds. I can't pay unless I get it from my people. They'll be pretty sick and write to Mr. Chatham. And if I don't get sacked when this comes out, on the top of that poker business, it'll be queer."

Mr. Baxendale sat silent, thinking. The news was not precisely an overwhelming surprise. Watt's gloomy air, coupled with Bax's other knowledge,

had prepared him for some disclosure. Betting was bad, but it might have been worse. Luckily, it was not too late to do something. He pondered deeply, and then——

"Look here!" he said presently: "you've been a mortal ass. But there are a good many mortal asses in the world (otherwise the bookies wouldn't be able to make a living), but I should hate to see you sacked. I suppose you're not the only chap that's been trying to make his fortune?"

"I'm not going to say anything about that," answered Watt.

Bax smiled.

"I don't want you to give away any of your pals. You needn't fear I shall press for their names, or any rot like that. But I want to stop this, and I'd like to lend a hand if it's needed. I assume there *are* other fellows who've been betting. Some of them—all of them, perhaps—have been able to pay their debts. Some of them may not. If there are any of these——"

"Well, there are," admitted Watt. "Of course, sir, I know you won't give them away——"

"You know, as well, that you needn't 'sir' me up here." Watt appreciated that. In the old days he had been proud of the privilege; lately . . . he had not known whether Bax would mind. The master went on: "Now, when chaps of your age and younger get in a hole, as likely as not they'll

choose the worst way out and tangle things more. I may be able to be of some use, or I may not. I can't tell till I know more. But I'd like you to do this. Go to these chaps and tell them what I say. If they'll give me their names, the amounts they owe, and the cash they have available, I'll see what can be done. I can't promise anything, but I'll try. . . . Anything they choose to tell me will be in strict confidence. I shall not hand on the knowledge so gained to any one else."

He spoke the last words with unusual emphasis. Then he got up and yawned.

"I've an engagement now," he said, "with a beast of a fag who won't appreciate the beauties of Cæsar. Sorry I must kick you out.—By the way, you might let me know to-morrow whether those other chaps are on. As for yourself, you're not to worry any more. I can promise you that it will be all right so far as you are concerned."

"Thanks," said Watt, rather thickly. "I don't know why on earth you should bother. . . . Dipcote might get along better without me . . . anyhow, the House would. . . ."

"Oh, I'm not so sure," said Bax, turning towards his writing-table; "I'm not so sure. . . ."

Watt waited a moment longer, wondering if there was anything more to come. Apparently there was not. Mr. Baxendale sat down with his back towards him, and began to correct verses,

humming an air from a comic opera. The football captain watched the broad-shouldered International with mixed emotions. Half-an-hour ago he had entered the room, miserably conscious of debt and probable disgrace. Now, he " was not to worry any more," for, so far as he was concerned, " it would be all right." It sounded like a fairy tale, this promised end to the worries that had long been his. He knew that he did not deserve his luck; he could not know fully why Bax should be so keen to promise help . . . save that Bax was a good sort . . . the best of sorts. With a smothered gulp Watt moved forward, anxious to give some kind of halting expression to his thanks. A thought struck him, saving him the necessity of speech. He turned thankfully, not feeling very rhetorical at that moment. After all, there was a better way of thanking Bax. Watt left the room without another word.

After tea that night he saw Merrifield and his friends. " Look here, you chaps ! " he began awkwardly; " I want to speak to you about the gees."

They listened open-mouthed while Watt dilated on Bax's offer.

" But you didn't tell him our names ? " asked Cole.

" I didn't," said Watt, " but you'll have to let me tell him if you want his help."

"What will he *do?*" asked Lutworth, not without anxiety. "Write to our people or what?"

"I don't know what he'll do," said Watt. "He might mean to lend us the money himself: he might make Whitehead and Jedbury wait: or he might have some secret plan up his sleeve. What I *do* know is that he's as silent as the grave. You can please yourselves. Personally, I've made a clean breast of my share. And I'm jolly glad I have."

Merrifield looked curiously at him, but said nothing. It was Lutworth who spoke.

"Can't say I'm keen on owning up," he said dismally; "but I don't see what else there is to do. —I say!" a thought struck him. "I suppose we shan't have to confess anything else—ragging, and so on, I mean? I don't see why I should own up to pilling Shawlands and losing the tail of my nightshirt. That was ordinary ragging. You don't think I shall have to tell that? No? All right, then. I owe something like fifteen shillings, and I've got three and twopence. What about you, Cole?"

"*Minus*, twelve; *plus*, two and fourpence," was the reply. "I vote we take Bax at his word. It's either that or a probable bust-up with Jed, and then the Old Man. You can put me down as a starter, Watt."

"What about you, Merry?" asked the captain.

Merrifield grinned. Troubles did not sit long on him.

"I'm all over Bax," he said. "Like that line we had in the poetry t'other day—better fall into his hands than the Old Man's. Put me down for three quid. Assets, *nil*."

"Good men," said Watt; "I'm glad you don't mind. I'll see Bax to-morrow." He paused and sighed rather heavily. "And now I'll tackle Wharton and Clark. I wonder how they'll take it."

"Swallow it like oil," predicted Merrifield. "Be only too glad to find a short cut out of his troubles, the swine!" He added, with a burst of candour that was characteristic, "Not that I've much reason to throw stones. We're all in the same boat over this. Except that . . ." he hesitated.

"Except what?" asked the captain.

Merrifield laughed, a little self-consciously.

"Except that we're not such out-and-out swine as Clark. He *is* the limit, and no mistake . . . Sorry, Watt, as he's a pal of yours, but I can't bear the man now."

Watt said nothing, either good or bad, with reference to the outspoken criticism. He left the study in a silence that at any rate was not disapproving. "He's a pal of yours" stuck in his thoughts as he walked away to Clark's study, and it stuck unpleasantly. Well, on the face of it there was

justification for Merrifield's statement. Clark had been a pal of his for longer than he cared to think. Attracted to him at first by his careless, cheerful, devil-may-care pose, admiring his brilliant football, Watt had gradually come to realise that Clark was not so desirable as he had seemed at the outset. But the break with Colquhoun and Beaton had driven him to seek less worthy companionship. It had taken the last naked display of Clark's unsporting, mean nature to cure Watt of all wishes for such support. With a sick sense of his own obtuseness the footer captain entered the study and unfolded the scheme of Bax to Clark and Wharton, whom he found alone. Both listened in silence. Wharton was the first to speak, and he made it gratefully clear that Merrifield had predicted truly. He owed about thirty shillings and was possessed of half-a-crown. Clark listened to his acceptance with a smile. When Watt turned to him he shook his head.

"Not for me, thanks," he said coolly. "If you chaps like to put yourselves into Bax's power, well and good. Personally, I've no intention of shoving my head into the lion's mouth."

"Bax is a decent chap," argued Watt, loath to escape himself and leave even a brute like Clark in the lurch. "I know jolly well there'll be no risk in telling Bax."

"Any proof of that?" asked Clark.

"Only the fact that I've given him my own name and told him my debts. Merrifield and the rest have done the same. That ought to be good enough for you."

Clark shook his head.

"No, thanks. Bax is a beak. Beaks are our natural enemies. *Verb. sap.*"

"Bax isn't an ordinary beak," persisted Watt, morbidly anxious to give Clark a show. "Look here! you've not been at Dipcote so long as we. We *know* the man can be trusted not to split, whatever happens. You'd much better let me tell him."

"I know a trick worth two of that," said Clark, with triumph that was almost a sneer. "You chaps can funk it and give yourselves away if you like. I'm a sportsman and mean to hang on."

"But you can't pay Whitehead," struck in Wharton. "Don't you be an old ass! You'd——"

"If you men had any pluck," said Clark, "you wouldn't be so ready to give in just because we've struck a bad patch. Now, I'll tell you what I mean to do. I've got an A 1 *sure* tip for to-morrow's big race. It's not from Jedbury this time: it's from a man in touch with the stable itself. I'm going to put no less than a quid on, and my winnings will absolutely clear me. If you like to stand in, you won't need to confess to Bax or any one else. Mind, this is *sure*. What do you say, Wharton?"

Wharton declined the sure thing. He meant to play for safety now.

"Watt?" said Clark persuasively.

"No, thanks," said the captain. "It may not come off, and, anyhow, I'm done with this. One of these days you'll be nabbed down town, and——"

"I shan't be nabbed," said Clark confidently. "I've not been out of bounds for weeks now. You know that kids have been getting shy of the Fleshergate, and I don't want to run needless risks. Jed knows how to work it without our breaking bounds. You'd much better come in."

Watt rose.

"I'm done with the gees," he said quietly. He might have added, "I'm done with you as well." But he refrained. After all, the man had once been a pal. No need to rub it in.

He left Clark's study and went back to his own, which was empty. He sat down and thought in silence for some little time. A good deal of his meditations were unpleasant, but there were promises of a silver lining to the clouds that had been so ominous and so long-threatening. After about twenty minutes' cogitation Watt rose and walked quickly along the corridor. He was on his way to thank Mr. Baxendale: curiously, his steps led him to Colquhoun's study. Within he found the school captain, Beaton, Shawlands, and Price at work. They looked up, astonished. For a moment no

one spoke. Then Colquhoun said cheerily, "Hello, Watt!"

Watt stood with his back to the door, one hand on the knob.

"I say, Colquhoun!" he said, with unwonted nervousness, "I know I've not been training with the rest of you, but I'm in pretty good trim all the same. If . . . if you like, I'll turn out for the House team . . . that is, if . . . if you like. . . ."

There was a brief silence, which was broken by Colquhoun.

"Good man," he said.

CHAPTER XXIII

By one of those freaks Fate is pleased to indulge in on occasion, Clark's "sure thing" came off. The infallible, red-hot, dreadnought, copper-bottomed, inside-knowledge tip from the man in touch with the stable for once justified the most extravagant expectations. "Billy-boy II" (to quote from the next morning's paper) "romped home the easiest of winners by a dozen lengths, his jockey easing him the last furlong. The significant silence of the crowd lent colour to the report that the operation known as 'skinning the lamb' had been effected with neatness and dispatch. It was not a day for favourites—indeed, only one of them did justice to his supporters during the meeting; and the layers of odds had good cause to congratulate themselves." Billy-boy II, it seemed, had started a rank outsider. His "price" was 100 to 8, and Clark had, therefore, won twelve pounds ten shillings. Owing his "bookie" about six pounds, there was some excuse for his triumphant sneers. When one has achieved a *coup* like this, it is not convenient to remember two things: (1) that in

the long run (and usually in the short run) the bookmaker almost always wins; and (2) that there are such things as "welshers," men who, when their bank balance is low, do not hesitate to refuse to pay. And in point of fact Clark never received his money, for Messrs. Whitehead and Jedbury "welshed" him along with a number of other patrons—men whose sporting propensities were only equalled by the violence of their comments when the truth broke upon them in due course. But as this did not become clear for a week or two, Clark could live in a roseate dream of Tom Tiddler's grounds, happily unconscious that the initial consonant of the revered Tiddler was doomed to be changed into a "D." In any case, his debt had been wiped off by the magic heels of Billy-boy II, and he audibly thanked his stars that he had not been ass enough to whine to Bax.

But whether the penitent debtors regretted their confession or not (and some regret would have been only natural, though foolish, under the circumstances), the thing was over and done with now. Watt had made his report to Bax, and the five disillusioned punters were received by him in his study. They sat down by request, rather uncomfortably, while Mr. Baxendale addressed the meeting from his pivot-chair.

"I won't waste much time," he said, "in telling you that you've been fools. Probably you know

that already. It's because I think you've been only fools—*chiefly* fools, I ought to say—that I mean to make this a private clean-up. If things had gone on, sooner or later it was bound to get known to the Chief and, of course, to your people. As you've had the sense to come to me, and because I don't want the House to get a bad name, I've decided to settle it quietly."

There were some murmurs of "Thank you, sir," which Bax waved aside.

"On conditions, of course. When you've heard what they are you can decide whether you mean to accept them or not. If you think them too drastic, you can say so and I'll let the thing slide. I have no right to "report," as you've come to me of your own free will. Well . . . your debts to these beauties are not legal: they couldn't be enforced at law. But you're old enough to know the meaning even of a gambling debt, and I think you ought to pay. The total debts amount to about ten pounds. I'm prepared to advance this as a loan. You will pay me half your weekly pocket-money, and half of any tips or presents you may receive from friends, relations, etc., until the debts are paid off. You will also promise me, on your words of honour, not to bet again in any shape or form so long as you're at Dipcote. What do you say?"

"I say 'Yes,'" replied Watt, without any hesita-

tion. "You've let us down easily, and . . . and I'm jolly grateful."

"You needn't answer at once, if you'd like time to think it over," said Bax.

Wharton, Merrifield, Lutworth and Cole glanced at each other, and shook their heads.

"I don't want any time, sir," said Merrifield. "I say the same as Watt."

The others followed suit, and Bax looked more like his cheerful self than he had looked at any time since the interview began.

"There's one other point," he said. "With your permission I shall do this. I shall see this man Whitehead, pay him and get a receipt. Incidentally I shall give him a piece of my mind. Also, I shall warn him that I mean to give the police a hint to keep an eye on his operations. Perhaps he doesn't deserve any warning, but—our betting laws are a mass of illogical injustice, favouring the rich at the expense of the poor—and I should prefer to give him a chance. Frankly, I don't suppose he'll take it, but at least he'll have had notice."

"Why do you ask us for 'our permission,' sir?" said Watt.

"For two reasons," answered Bax. "Because you've given me this information in confidence, and I don't think I've any right to act on it without your leave. That's one. Secondly, I think it quite possible that there may be other fellows in

the school who haven't chucked and don't mean to chuck betting. I don't ask for information on that point: I don't know so much as a single name. But, if there be such, and if they knew that the police had been asked to keep an eye on Whitehead, it might make them think twice about running into danger."

There was a silence. Every one thought of Clark and wondered how much the all-wise Bax might know.

"Supposing there were such," said Watt slowly: "wouldn't it be rather like getting them into trouble? Wouldn't it be rather low after we've escaped?"

"Not if you gave them fair warning," said Bax. He leaned forward and his voice became graver. "Look here, you chaps! You've narrowly escaped being landed in a nasty mess. This betting business is a stupid and rotten thing—a thing that, if it goes on, might do no end of harm to the school. I'm keen on Dipcote and I believe you are. Betting *must* be stamped on. If you give fair and full warning to all whom it may concern, you need have no fears about doing an unsporting thing. That's my honest conviction. What do you say?"

They agreed without a dissentient, though one amendment was subsequently carried. When the meeting adjourned it was settled that Bax should liquidate the debts next day, but refrain from

drawing police attention to the Fleshergate until Monday. That gave four clear days for due and adequate warnings to "all whom it might concern."

When the door was shut Bax heaved a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness!" he muttered to himself. "I don't think we shall hear much more of betting in Chatham's for a long time at any rate. Those chaps are straight, and . . . and they'll help to keep the House on the right lines."

Clark received his warning, and as usual sneered. "Police!" he scoffed. "D'you think Jedbury and Whitehead have been in business all this time without thinking of the police? As a matter of fact, I daresay the police have had suspicions for some time. I shouldn't wonder if that's the reason why Whitehead doesn't receive callers at his shop now. Probably he's been given a straight tip and acted on it accordingly. 'Police!' Great Scott! One would think Bax had been born yesterday."

"How do you put your dibs on then?" asked Wharton, who had conveyed the warning. Watt and Merrifield no longer visited the study, and Cole and Lutworth had begged to be excused.

Clark winked.

"A secret's no secret when it's been told," he observed. "I *do* get it on, and quite safely. You can tell Watt and his high-toned pals that I'm quite able to look after myself. If they prefer to be

funks, let them. I wonder what Jed thought when Billy-boy's number went up?"

He hugged himself visibly, while Wharton lugubriously remembered a text about the wicked flourishing like green bay-trees. For the next few days nothing happened to ruffle the calm of Dipcote —nothing illegal, that is to say. There was plenty of excitement of a saner sort than racing, for the matches were now in full swing. All School matches were over, but the house-ties never failed to produce thrills. The School House were the favourites for the senior cup, for they had the most well-balanced and level team of all. Chatham's, had they had their star three-quarter line, would have been spotted as certain winners; but Colquhoun was crocked, and Clark steadily refused to turn out. Watt disappointed early private rumours (they had been jealously kept from Dipcote at large) by playing. But in spite of Watt's brilliance, Chatham's was beaten in the first round by a goal and two tries to *nil*. The interest of the House now lay in the doings of the Second fifteen, captained by the monosyllabic Sands. Thanks to Colquhoun's exertions and the enforced training, a Second fifteen considerably above the average had been produced. On Wednesday, they had swamped the School House second by thirty points to three. On Friday, they had beaten Campbell's by sixteen points to six. On Saturday they met Tollerton's in the

final, and their hopes were high. Tollerton's were undoubtedly good, but Chatham's had their tails up and were out for blood, or at least victory. "Keep your heads in the scrum," advised Pettigrew, before the game, "and we shall do the trick all right. Remember you've got the hottest backs any Second has seen for years. Don't starve us, and we'll bring back the cup."

"Unless you mull your passes, in your usual style," put in a genial libeller. The subsequent "scrap" was averted by Pettigrew remembering that he mustn't get crocked until after the game. The libeller, who had Pettigrew's head in chancery, unwillingly admitted that the plea was valid.

Saturday afternoon came at long last. The final for the Inter-house Second fifteen was played on the Yards ground, the First Final being down for the big game pitch on the playground. The latter game naturally attracted the bulk of Dipcote; but as Chatham's was out of the hunt for the senior cup, the House turned out *en masse* to watch the juniors. Less science was to be expected, but no fewer thrills. Partisanship ran keenly. Spectators were prone at times to forget the high standard expected by the Dipcote Code. Whereas the watchword from the School "gate" at School matches was "Hard footer—as hard as you like, but *clean!*", excited juniors in House games had been heard to scream "Screw his neck!" or voice

audible doubts on the referee's impartiality. Such lamentable lapses, if heard by a responsible senior, were liable to be corrected by surreptitious but vigorous "bootings." More than one of Chatham's fags, I regret to say, during this eventful game found himself propelled suddenly towards the ropes by deftly applied footwear. On such occasions the sufferer's facial and vocal vicissitudes were worth watching. Beginning with fierce grimaces and voluble "Screw him, Bulldog! Screw him! Hack him, Jimmy! Use your feet! Scrag him!" and the like, he would relapse into a sudden yelp of pain, "*Owhhh!*" and the rope would bulge from the impact of the victim's body. He would turn with a fierce "You beastly cad! Wait till I——" and then subside into a *diminuendo* of "*Ooohh!* I'm awfully sorry, Beaton!" or Shawlands, or Merrifield, or whoever the administrator of justice happened to be. And then, as the A. of J. walked on down the touch line, would come a revengeful whine, "Just 'cos he's three stone heavier than me, the swipe!"—while his pal would sympathise, "You ass! I told you that you'd get it in the neck if you didn't look out!"

"But it wasn't in the neck!" grumbled Hinkle, who had been the most recent victim of zeal outrunning discretion. "Just you wait till you've had a lift from Merrifield, and then you'll know."

"If you didn't jaw so much there might be some

chance of watching the game," returned Paget, hanging over the ropes in his anxiety to follow a passing movement. "Oh! well played, Blythe! Well collared, sir!—Now, dribble it on, you chaps! Dribble it *on!*"

"Chat-ham's! Chat-ham's!" droned the majority of the gallery while a scrum was formed. The game had been in progress for twenty minutes, and up to the present there had been no scoring. Chances had been thrown away on both sides. Bad passes had been frequent: dropped passes and "knocks-on" not seldom. The forwards had striven to atone for a lack of hooking skill by giving an exhibition of what is sometimes politely described as "robust" play, though detractors of Rugby might use a harsher term. Twice had the referee sounded his whistle and addressed the contending factions in the most *recta* of *orationes*. "I shan't warn any of you again," he observed on the second occasion. "If I see any more dirty play—any hacking in the scrum or screwing outside of it—the man will go off. There's no need to turn a junior house-match into a dog-fight."

Chatham's partisans clapped pointedly on each occasion. Tollerton's supporters, weaker in point of numbers, were no less noisy in their approbation. Any right-thinking observer could prove to his house's complete satisfaction that at all events *his* side knew how to play the game, no matter what low,

filthy, bounderish, pro-like tactics the other brutes were obliged to employ in order to win the cup at any cost. It was useless to demonstrate to either section of the fags that the referee, Tait, of the School House, was a neutral—that he had no obvious end to serve in furthering the chances of either side. Tollerton's fags would argue that Tait had been talking to Colquhoun before the game—an ominous portent. Chatham's advocates (always from the Lower Study) knew for a fact that Briggs, the Tollerton second fifteen captain, had been let off a lamming by Tait *that very morning!* It was a Tollerton junior who mourned that they only had a member of the Dipcote second fifteen acting as their touch-judge, whereas Chatham's were represented by no less a person than Colquhoun himself on the line. The inference, driven home in plain, blunt Anglo-Saxon, was that Bastable, the Tollerton touch-judge, would knuckle down under Tait's palpable browbeating, while Colquhoun was big enough to make Tait swallow the football if it seemed likely to advance the cause of Chatham's.

Amid such pleasant exchanges the game progressed. The play itself was not sufficiently interesting to describe in detail. The ground was very heavy after rain; the juniors' nerves at unusual tension owing to the prize at stake and the unwonted gallery; the football skill and knowledge of an order that was not high. Briefly, it was mud-

larking, varied by a few—a very few—bouts of passing and high punting that as often as not failed to find touch. Half-time came, and still neither line had been crossed. The teams enjoyed the five minutes' interval both for the welcome breather and the unusual honour of being supplied with lemons. These last had been paid for by Colquhoun, who brought them on unexpectedly as a fillip to earnest players, in blossom or in bud. The more ferocious Tollertonians observed with grudging admiration that the lemons were offered to both teams indiscriminately; though a happy suggestion was made that the Chathamite lemons had a secret mark on them, to distinguish them from a poisoned variety that was now being devoured by the enemy. The referee's whistle put an end to this ingenious theorising, and once more the teams lined up for a renewal of the fray.

The spectators hoped for a change of tactics and better football, but they were doomed to disappointment. Scrum followed scrum with unending monotony. Punts were exchanged with little resultant gain to either side. A dribble by Chatham's was countered by a Tollerton breakaway. Pettigrew was grassed on the line amid cheers and counter-cheers, and then the Tollerton forwards swept the game back into the Chatham twenty-five. Both teams were getting blown now, and the referee had an easier task. Watches began to

be consulted, and fellows speculated on the possibilities of a pointless draw and a re-play on Monday. Colquhoun on the touch line was looking anxious. He very badly wanted his team to win. With ordinary decent luck the House First fifteen would have won the Senior Competition. As they had failed, he was anxious to pull off something with the Second. And he had coached and shepherded these kids with patient zeal. If only they could—

A shout recalled him from thought. He saw the ball come out from the scrum with comparative swiftness. It went to Pettigrew, who passed it quite decently to the other centre. Fifteen yards were gained . . . a punt over the intervening crowd . . . a roar of anticipation as the ball was allowed to bounce (horror !) and bounced the wrong way. . . . The Chatham forwards swept on in a sweating mass, dribbling for all they were worth. Down to the Tollerton twenty-five they dribbled, brushing aside three-quarters who vainly tried to " get down to it, you asses ! " Over the Tollerton line at last—at last it went, amid a frenzied howling. Goss, the eighth forward of Chatham Second fifteen, fell prone and gasping. He clawed frantically, grabbing to forestall the Tollerton full back. He got the touch by a hair's breadth, and Sands converted.

No side. Chatham's Second fifteen had done their bit.

CHAPTER XXIV

Monday came, Black Monday, the beginning of another week's work; but to at least one member of the Third Form the day dawned full of cheer and pride. Thanks to unusual industry and application Goss got through the morning without a single impot or even a reprimand. At 12 o'clock he took up a "Leave down town" slip for Bax to sign, preferring an unusual, but not unprecedented request. "Please, sir, may I have extra leave to go into Harperley Street?"

"Why?" asked Bax pleasantly. "Tired of the dull routine, the eternal sameness of bounds? The spring getting into your blood?"

Goss modestly explained. There had been, it seemed, a voluntary levy for a certain object. Chaps had subbed up. In recognition of his having scored on Saturday, he had been given the office of deputation, delegate, or buyer-in-chief. Half-a-crown had been subscribed in fifteen separate twopences. He was to expend this on a suitable article for a definite purpose, to be kept secret in the meantime. In Harperley Street there was

a greater variety of shops. He confided the secret to Bax, who nodded approval and signed an additional slip. "And may I take Caterham with me?" asked Goss. Again Bax nodded. Caterham was provided with a similar permit. Mr. Chatham's confirmatory initials were secured, and the two juniors departed happily on their expedition.

They went down town the usual way, *via* the Deacons' Bridge and Canongate, and in due course found themselves in Harperley Street. After spending a pleasant quarter-of-an-hour in studying the shop-windows, arguing over the respective merits of a fountain-pen, a penknife, a jigsaw puzzle, a model aeroplane, a stamp album, and heaven knows what beside, a purchase was achieved. It was now time to think of going back, and Goss suggested a variation.

"Tell you what, kid," he said. "Let's go round by the tow-path. It's almost as short, and a jollier walk."

"But we'd have to break bounds to get there," objected Caterham. "We can only get on to the tow-path by Jacob's Ladder or Sanderson's Lane."

"We're out of bounds now in Harperley Street," returned Goss, "and we've got leave. Jacob's Ladder and Sanderson's Lane are only ten yards from where we're standing. Bax wouldn't mind that, I'm sure."

There was some reason in this. Harperley Street led to Sevel Bridge. From the bridge to the tow-path were two approaches: Jacob's Ladder—a stone stairway, and Sanderson's Lane, a cartroad that dipped sharply and curved under the bridge. It was a retired, little-used lane not more than eighty or a hundred yards long. The tow-path, of course, was in bounds, and as they were in Harperley Street only a super-sensitive beak could object to such a technical offence. Caterham's *caveat* was speedily overborne, and the deputation and friend entered the lane with careless hearts, unconscious that an adventure was in store. They were about midway down and had turned the corner when beyond them they saw two figures. One was a rather seedy-looking man in a tweed suit; the other, a big boy wearing the Dipcote cap.

"It's Clark!" said Goss, in surprise, and paused, wondering whether it had been wise, after all, to risk even a technical offence.

Even as he checked, he saw Clark hand something white to the man and then turn sharply towards the river. But suddenly, from behind the gate leading to Sanderson's Yard, burst three other men. Clark and his companion did not wait, but incontinently took to their heels. The three newcomers, however, were too quick for them, and the next moment Goss and Caterham amazedly saw a dramatic

seizure. The man who had Clark was a powerful, thick-set fellow, who had small difficulty in holding his captive; but there was a most fascinating struggle on the ground before the other (whose name, they learned later, was Jedbury) would admit defeat.

Goss and Caterham approached with caution.

"Better lie still," they heard one say to the prostrate Jedbury, who was still writhing. "Won't do yourself no good, you know."

"Name and address?" demanded Clark's captor, retaining his grip with one hand, while with the other he sought for a notebook.

"You let me go!" said Clark angrily. "I've got a perfect right to come here if I like! I'll——"

"Betting in a public place within the meaning o' the Act," returned the other. "Saw you pass him a betting slip.—Watch he don't get into his pockets," he advised, turning his head to his fellow-captors, "and chuck away the rest."

"O.K." one answered equably. "There's plenty here to go on with.—Ah! there!" he apostrophised the heaving Jedbury. "Lie still—lie *still*, will you?—till I've fixed it proper."

"Name and address, please?" reiterated the man who held Clark, who refused to answer. Instead he made a fresh effort to wrench himself free—an effort that was easily frustrated. The plain-clothes-man's eye wandered to the cap, and

he did not trouble to pursue his inquiries. "Dipcote colours," he murmured. "The best thing you can do is to come along with me and see what your master has to say."

"All right. I'll go quietly," said Clark, sullenly yielding to the inevitable. "There's no need to hold my arm."

"Excuse me, but I think there is," returned the other. He cocked his head towards his fellows. "I'll take this young gentleman up to the school. You can look after Jedbury."

They agreed cheerfully, raising the scowling and voluble tipster to his feet.

At that moment Goss and Caterham, thrilled to the marrow, realised that it was ten minutes to one, and that there was every prospect of their being late for dinner. Loath as they were to leave the scene (they had meant to follow the arrested Clark at a discreet interval, hoping that he might yet make some hearty or bloodthirsty effort to escape), they realised that this was a pleasure they must deny themselves. Breaking into a sharp trot, they returned by the way they had come, finally arriving at Chatham's just as the second bell was ringing. No time to wash or brush-up. Breathless, perspiring, bursting with exclusive news, they went into the dining-room and sat down.

"Well, have you got it?" whispered Pettigrew, who sat next to Goss.

The latter looked at the president with a dull eye.

"Got what?" he asked.

"You don't mean to say you've been down town and forgotten the sub!" ejaculated Pettigrew, in amazed disgust. "See what comes of sending a new kid——"

"Oh, *that!*" said Goss, remembering. "Yes: I got that all right. But"—he dropped his voice mysteriously, "there's going to be the most frightful row you ever heard of in about two ticks."

"Good," said the president, with zest. "Tell us about it."

"I'll tell you after dinner," said Goss. "No: really I'm not swanking. It's too frightfully awful to *breathe* in here. Wait till we get into the Lower Study."

"Right oh!" said Pettigrew, resigning himself to the annoying delay. Goss's awed aspect impressed him in spite of himself. "Hi, you chaps!" He leaned forward and whispered. "Pass the word along that there's a ROW on. News in the Lower Study after grub. No second helps to-day!" And then, suddenly realising that a place was vacant: "I say! is it anything about Clark? He's not in for dinner. *Is* it? You might tell."

Goss wagged his head, refusing to commit himself.

Thanks to the generalship of Pettigrew,

dinner was over a full five minutes before the usual time. At last grace was said, and at long last Goss and Caterham were free to burst their bomb-shell before an appreciative audience. For once in his retired life Caterham found himself a popular hero, one on whose lips an eager crowd hung, thirsting for every detail that he could supply or invent. Goss naturally played the leading part in the narration, but Caterham was frequently appealed to in order that he might amplify or corroborate. And when the first edition had been absorbed and partially digested, Caterham was consulted as being an additional eye-witness, an extra special representative on the spot, and made to give in his own words his own version of the affair. Were they really detectives? And what did they look like? Had they revolvers anywhere about them, or what? There was intense interest and envy of the lucky pair who had dropped into the thick of it. It was a novel experience for Caterham to have fellows fighting to get near him: novel, and by no means unpleasant. The Lower Study buzzed with excitement. What would happen? Would Clark get penal servitude or be merely sacked?

In due course the news reached the studies and, finally (but by a different channel), Mr. Baxendale. Clark did not appear. At four o'clock the school-bell drove a murmurous house to two hours of school. Tea came, and still no sign of Clark. Seven

o'clock found Colquhoun and Beaton discussing possibilities in their study. Watt came in soon after: his relations with Colquhoun had become more than cordial since the memorable evening when he had offered to play for the House and his offer had been gladly accepted.

"Is there anything fresh?" he asked.

Colquhoun shook his head.

"Not a word," he answered. "A crop of rumours—all of 'em lies, most likely."

"There must be something up, though," said Beaton. "Goss and Caterham stick to their yarn, and Clark is *non est*, as we scholars say. If somebody doesn't come soon and tell me something, I shall go and speak seriously to Chatham."

There was a knock at the door and Mr. Baxendale came in. He looked grave, and sat down without his usual cheery greeting.

"You may as well know what's happened," he said abruptly. "The sooner the truth's known the better. Clark was caught giving a betting-slip to a bookie this morning. He was taken to the Chief, and . . . he's left Dipcote for good."

There was a silence, not precisely of amazement, for every one had looked for a "sacking," but of shock at the suddenness, the swiftness of it all.

Beaton presently asked a question that had been exercising them. "Is there any chance of his being

jailed, or fined, or anything of that sort?" he inquired.

"No," said Bax. "The bookie will be prosecuted and, I suppose, fined. If he doesn't pay the fine, he'll have to go to gaol. But Clark's a *minor* —an 'infant' in the eyes of the law, and he won't have to face that. There was some talk of his having to appear as a witness. Luckily they have other evidence and it won't be necessary. I'm glad that a Dipcote fellow won't have to come before the magistrate."

"What other evidence?" asked Colquhoun.

"Other slips. And the evidence of the detectives who made the arrest. They've had their eye on him for some little time. I'm not sorry . . . that I hadn't the job of putting them on the track, after all."

"Then didn't you?" asked Watt. "We thought you must have. . . . Thought it pretty quick work, of course, but . . . "

"No. I had meant to go and see the superintendent this evening, but it's proved unnecessary. It seems that the local police have been watching Whitehead's shop for weeks, but he's dropped the over-the-counter business. . . . Well, it's a beastly upset. I hate a fellow getting sacked, even . . . even though he deserves it. Of course, this coming on top of the poker row, *plus* a general reputation for unsatisfactoriness, left the Chief with no other

course. Dipcote won't lose by it, but . . . I hate it . . . I always hate it. . . ."

Bax rose, grunted in a melancholy fashion, and left the room. He was unfeignedly glad that Clark had gone, but . . . all the same he hated the necessity of it. If only Clark had been sensible enough to own up when the others had confessed! Something might have been done . . . perhaps . . . Bax didn't feel sure. . . . Clark had seemed a "rotter." But Mr. Baxendale did not like a rotter to pursue his rottenness. So long as there was even a faint chance, he tried to lend a hand. It displeased him to fail, though he knew it was not his fault.

After he had gone there was little conversation. The swift and summary justice that had been dealt out sobered even Beaton. Watt was thinking of his own escape. "It might have been me . . . it might have been me . . ." Well, thanks to Bax, he had been given another chance, and he meant to make the most of it. There was still the summer term during which he could back up Colquhoun; and by Jove! he would back him up. And Bax had hinted that next term the monitor's cap might be restored.

Colquhoun's voice cut the thread of his thoughts.

"Half past seven," he said, getting up and beginning to gather together a few papers. "My prep to-night. Is it Chatham's or Bax's?"

"Chatham's," said Beaton. "Give him my love, and tell him to be sure and not overwork himself. If you want to please him tell him I'm on the track of a new Particle and mean to present it to him."

Neither Watt nor Colquhoun smiled. They were not in smiling mood. Watt rose and went off to his own study. Beaton pulled out a Tacitus and with groans began to prepare for work. Colquhoun walked along the passage and entered the Lower Study. The room was tidied up and sedate. Every junior was in place. Books were open, and an unusual absence of whispering made itself felt. As yet there was no news of Clark's expulsion: that would come later. Mildly wondering as to the cause of this unwonted stillness, the Dipcote captain leant against the mantelpiece and opened a book. Presently a trampling of feet was heard. He looked up. Fifteen fags walked solemnly, respectfully towards him, headed by Pettigrew.

"Hello!" said Colquhoun, suspecting some hidden rag. "What's all this?"

"Please, Colquhoun," said the president modestly, "it's a Round Robin."

"A what?" asked the captain blankly.

"A Round Robin—a sort of general letter. We want you to let us read it."

Still unsuspecting, but realising that no rag was intended, Colquhoun nodded amiably. Whereupon

Pettigrew produced a sheet of paper covered with writing, and read the following inspiring message—

> "We, the undersigned, members of the Chatham Second Fifteen, beg to congratulate you as Head of the House on the late victory of the Chatham Second Fifteen. The Chatham Second Fifteen is proud to have won the Second Fifteen Inter-House Competition. We hope that you are pleased with their efforts. The Chatham Second Fifteen feel that they won because you coached them. They wish to express their appreciation in the usual manner. [*Half a mo, you chaps! Not yet!*] Accordingly the Chatham Second Fifteen beg that you will accept the enclosed (*it isn't enclosed, Colquhoun, but we thought that was the right word*) testimonial, in honour of the Chatham Second Fifteen and your unwearied coaching. Signed :—"

"—and then there's all the names of the team, Colquhoun.—Now, then, Sands! Look sharp!"

Thus adjured, the captain of Chatham's Second fifteen, with many blushes, produced a pen-tray —the purchase of the deputation that morning.

Colquhoun received the "testimonial" with an unmoved countenance and considerable appreciation. These decent kids . . .

"Thanks awfully, you chaps!" he said. "It's awfully good of you, and I needn't say that this is a complete surprise. I'd never dreamed of anything of the sort. . . . You know I'm jolly glad you pulled it off, and I was only too pleased to be of any use. I won't pretend to believe that I wasn't of any use, for I saw you play 'before and after,' and I saw Pettigrew, for instance, go for the tackle like an old hand." (Cheers and laughter, while Pettigrew effaced himself.) "Well, I'm not much of a hand at speeches, so I'll only say again, 'Thanks most awfully.' It's jolly good of you, and I appreciate it."

Caterham, carried away by the occasion, and a bit above himself after his late successes, suddenly went mad and called out, "Three cheers for Colquhoun!" Nobody rebuked him for such presumption. Instead, the sacred silence of preparation was rent by resounding whoops. Colquhoun let them cheer, benignantly regarding "These decent kids," forgetful of past worries, raggings, and rebellion. Chatham's had pulled round, and next term promised to be good. After a minute's uproar he said cheerfully, "Thanks, awfully. Jolly good of you, I'm sure. And now, come on! Let's do a little prep."

The Lower Study settled down again to work, highly pleased with itself.

Presently the door opened, and Mr. Chatham

came in to relieve guard. He approached Colquhoun, and spoke in a hushed tone suitable to the occasion.

"I thought just now that I heard a noise . . ."

"Yes, sir," smiled the captain. "I'm afraid you did. But it was a special occasion, and——" his eye wandered over the bent heads—"everything's quiet now."

THE END